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SYLVIA'S HUSBAND

By Mrs. Burton Harrison

THROUGH a green wood near a castle not far from the western coast of Ireland, runs a salmon river, foaming here, tranquil there; everywhere beautiful to look upon, and coveted exceedingly by would-be tenants, whenever the owner's agents in London give sign to the public that the place and its fishing-privileges are to be let for the season.

Following up yonder leafy tunnel beside the stream to its finish, one comes to a halt beneath a steep flight of stone steps, affixed to a wall matted with roses and jasmine, on the summit of which, lost from below in a mist of tree-tops, is the terrace of Ballyrig Castle, upon which open the chief living-rooms.

There is nothing dark or frowning, or romantic or feudal, about Ballyrig. It is simply a big, pleasant old Irish country-house, standing amid park and gardens and fields of grain, in a country of purple hills and boggy moors and innumerable little lakes. But a few miles away the Atlantic booms upon the shore, and Ballyrig River runs through many a mile of the estate.

Indoors, the rooms are as cheerful and up-to-date as electricity, a London upholsterer and a house-party of gay, rollicking people can make them.

This was, at least, the case during the Summer when the castle was let to the William Hillyards, he a rich city man who two or three years before had committed the indiscretion of marrying a beautiful young wife who might have been his daughter—and he was still her infatuated slave, in spite of many disillusion!

It had been said that it was Hugh Sargent whom Natalie would have married had there been money enough between them to keep this extravagant pair from the poorhouse. And, by the usual irony of Fate, directly after she became possessed of an elderly, jealous spouse, Hugh Sargent had fallen heir to an uncle's title and estates, and was now a baronet, owner of a stately old show-house and gardens not far from London.

Upon this bachelor establishment, Natalie would descend now and again, with parties of her friends, and please herself with ordering things as if it had been indeed her own.

Hugh submitted to these and other impositions of hers in a lazy way; but those who knew him best could see that he was beginning to chafe under her assumption of a continued proprietorship in him and his. Her quite extraordinary beauty might still palliate her exactions, and cast a glamour over her pose as the victim of a matrimonial *faux-pas*; but Hugh was a man of healthy mind, of daily renewing interests in life, and void of ambition to play the eternal game of three, especially when the husband had recently given symptoms of vulgar and elemental jealousy in his direction. Why he had consented to come to Ballyrig, at all, perhaps only Kit Vail suspected.

Vail, also a member of the present house-party, a friend of Sargent's of years' standing, and a thoroughly likable and trustworthy fellow, had a reason of his own for accepting the Hillyards' bid to Ireland. He could see, very plainly, that his hostess wished to

help matters along in his suit with her husband's ward, Sylvia Ridgeway, and for once—although differently inspired—agreeing with the fitful Natalie, Vail could not resist taking his holiday as her guest.

And what had been the result of this nicely adjusted scheme? Every day, since the arrival of Sargent and Vail, they had gone out with their rods, Sylvia accompanying them, by particular dispensation of Natalie, who loved to persuade herself that Sir Hugh's apparent zeal for sport was a blind to divert attention from his secret hopeless passion for herself. And, every day, Sargent and Sylvia would drift together, leaving Vail to the gillies, or any other companionship he could find.

Sylvia! Young, tall, slim, pretty, truth-telling, and admirably bred by the good ladies of the convent-school in France, where she had lived since her father's death when she was but fifteen! No wonder that she and Natalie would no more mix than oil and water! The transfer, without discussion, of this young woman to live in their own house, some ten months earlier, was the one of her husband's actions that Natalie considered most indefensible. Mr. Hillyard's plea that Sylvia was the child of his dearest friend of youth, as well as ill-provided with the means of livelihood, had been met successively by remonstrance, rebuke, pathos and tears, and, ultimately, sulks. Sylvia, in spite of all, had come, had stayed, had won every heart but Natalie's, and now Natalie, falling back upon piety, had decided Vail to be heaven's direct answer to her prayers for deliverance from her cross.

She did not like Kit Vail. He had always had a provoking way of looking through, not at, her. He, also, was a sort of cousin of Sylvia's. And she strongly suspected him of putting the brake on Hugh Sargent, whenever Hugh yielded to her whims, or gave color to the gossip that did not fail to dog their footsteps.

The other people in the Ballyrig house-party included the Fortescues,

mother and daughter—rather a dreadful couple—but, then, Natalie distinctly did not like women to be too nice. Mrs. Fortescue, known as "Fair-and-Forty" to her friends, was a showy divorcée, who eked out her share of the wreck of matrimony by writing personals to newspapers from houses where she was invited as a guest, by playing suspicious rubbers of bridge, and by judicious borrowing from men.

Her too-mature daughter, Maud, resembling a gone-off Botticelli nymph, long, lank, with high cheek-bones, and unsatisfied corners to her mouth, dressed showily, said little, wore white veils with large, black dots, and evinced a marked preference for the society of undefended youths of a tender age and little knowledge of society.

During the last day or two, symptoms had appeared of Maudie's having attached herself seriously to the pursuit of Bobby Hillyard, a delightful boy of twenty, son and heir of the absent host, and far and away too good, thought Vail, Sargent and Sylvia, for the fate that threatened him.

Captain O'Rourke, a nice-looking soldier at large, with a happy faculty for making people friendly with him whether or not they quite approved of him; Baron de Lorme, a *confrère* at bridge with Mrs. Fortescue; Mr. Godfrey, who yearned to be thought an advanced decadent and had come to Ireland to write poetry which only he, the publisher, printers and proofreader could reasonably be counted upon to read, were the last ones left of the much larger party which Mr. Hillyard was supposed to have been called to London to avoid.

Luncheon time of a perfect day of July found young Bobby Hillyard coming up a path from the river into a wooded glen—a pretty, shady place, where several paths converged, and on one side of which arose a rocky cliff, giving to view a most lovely reach of distant landscape. Upon a carpet of moss and flowers were strewn moss-covered boulders surrounding a level spot, at the foot of which three slender,

white-stemmed birches leaned together over a little spring.

Bobby was attended by Terence, his own gillie, a cock-eyed Irishman of infinite good-fellowship, who carried his salmon tackle. The boy's ingenuous and merry young face was clouded by the bitterness of ill-luck.

"Hang it all, Terence!" he said, for perhaps the twentieth time during their walk, "I can't think how I let that big fellow get away."

"Sure, if he'd known you as well as I do, Masther Bobby," said the gillie, with prompt flattery, "he'd have sthayed along with ye."

"Shut up with your blarney!" Bobby answered, half-smiling. "In my opinion, the Ballyrig fishery's not half what it's cracked up to be, and I wish my governor had taken another river. The hanged part of it is having to leave Sargent down there hard at it. 'Twould be just like him to land a forty-pounder before he strikes work. Of course, Sylvia would be pleased. Girls always side with the lucky one. But Sargent won't have long, for it's nearly grub time, and this must be the place where we're to meet."

"'Deed, an' it is, Masther Bobby. Many's the time I've seen the quality sit here, atin' and drinkin' their fills, after a hard day's fish. Faith, 'tis a lovely spot for a picnic, an' I'm wishin' your honor good appetite, an' a taste of somethin' consolin', to make ye forget the foolishness o' thim salmon."

"You can go now, Terence. Take my traps back to the house; and, mind, when you get to the servants' hall, no blabbing about my poor sport to-day."

"'Deed, thin, I won't, sir," protested Terence. "I'd no more be tellin' it on ye than the fishes themselves would."

"I don't trust you," answered the lad, smiling, and taking a piece of silver from his pocket. "D'ye think this would make it worth your while to hold your tongue?"

"For the matther o' that, aday, sir," exclaimed Terence, with a cordial grin, "I'd go into residence in an asylum for the dumb."

Bobby was in the act of lighting a cigarette.

"Hullo! Wait a minute. What's that coming down the path from the castle, Terence?" he said, curiously.

"Sure, sir," the gillie answered, gazing up a tunnel of green boughs, "there do be somethin' comin'. Whether 'tis a lady or a gentleman, I can't rightly say; but 'twill be one or the other, I'll go bail."

"Aunty, by Jove!" cried Bobby, slapping his leg, ecstatically. "Aunty Loo, just from America. It's a lady, Terence, my governor's maiden sister, who quarreled with him at my christening, and flew away on a broomstick to the States. She's strong-minded, is Aunt Lucretia, and never yet was there a fad that passed her by. Wonder if I might count on her for a fiver, in the joy of reunion with her only nephew?"

"Sure, an' it's a butheful foine figgur of a man her ladyship is, entoirely," said Terence, straining his neck forward, lost in admiration and wonder.

A stout lady, dressed in mannish tweeds, wearing an alpine hat and spectacles, bore down upon him with such a rapid stride, that a collision ensued between the two. She fixed her gaze upon the offending gillie, making him shrivel visibly, and, in a voice of thunder, cried out:

"Man!"

"Confound you, Terence, get out with you!" said Bobby. And Terence flew.

"I hope my gillie hasn't hurt you, ma'am—bumping into you like that," he added.

"Only trampled my feet outrageously," was the indignant answer.

"Oh, but you know it wouldn't have happened if they'd been large enough to see."

Miss Lucretia fixed on him a penetrating gaze, but his sweet expression remained unwavering.

"Humph!" said she, finally, a comment into which the good lady was wont to put a startling variety of emphasis.

"Come to the picnic? Nice morning, isn't it?" Bobby hurried on, rather nervously.

"And pray, sir, who are you?" asked she, cutting him short, without compunction.

"I don't know for certain, but I rather think I'm your nephew, Aunt Loo; incidentally, your brother William's only child; in brief, Robert Charles Ernest Alured Hillyard, commonly known as Bobby."

"You, Bobby?" she said, severely. "Why, it's impossible! When I last saw you, they were quieting you with a bottle."

"They can do so still, aunty, every time."

"Come to think of it, I've brought you a little horse," said aunty, with the ghost of a twinkle in her eyes.

"Make it a pony, Aunt Loo, and you'll put an indigent relative under a debt of everlasting gratitude."

"What *do* you mean, boy? It can't be that William, rich as he is, refuses to provide for his only son! No, sir, I've heard of you—throw away that filthy cigarette!"

"I beg your pardon," Bobby said, obeying meekly.

"A good cigar, now, I can stand. But a nasty cigarette—I'll lend you my monograph on that subject—pah! Now, Mr. Robert Charles Ernest Alured Hillyard, commonly known as Bobby, if you can look me squarely in the face, and tell me you're not an idle, extravagant fellow, who richly deserves being kept on a small allowance—as to whom there are grave doubts whether he'll manage to pull through the university—why, hold out your hand, and I'll give you that fiver—yes, and five times that fiver, on the spot."

Bobby looked the old lady full in the eyes. Hers had in them a combination of expressions of which it was hard for him to distinguish the one predominant.

"I wish I could, Aunt Loo," he said, simply, putting his hands behind him.

"Bobby Hillyard, I'll not tip you, but I'll—I'll shake hands with you!" exclaimed the Amazon.

"All right, aunty," said he, submitting to a mighty shake; "I thought

you ought to know. I've spent a pot of money at college, and my governor is no end riled about my prospects of, as you say, skinning through——"

"Riled"!—as I say. 'Skinning through'! Robert, where did you get such common expressions?"

"Americanisms, aunty. Thought they'd make you feel at home. Learned 'em from Capper, a boss Yankee in college with me. I was half-back on his team."

"Half-back! Poor fellow! I thought you seemed anatomically correct," said the lady, proceeding to walk around him, in critical survey. "Nonsense, child! you're as straight as straight can be. Come, now, I'll take you in hand! I'll begin by giving you my leaflet on the adaptation to modern life of the Pythagorean creed."

"Pytho—anything to do with snakes?" asked he, politely.

"Is it possible, young man, you have never read my monograph on 'The Perfectly Rounded Life'?"

"Where you said every one should wear Jaeger from top to toe?" he answered, brightening.

"Nonsense! That was ages ago. I now go in for aërated linen mesh," said Aunt Loo, with perfect gravity. "No, my dear lad; my work aims for the reform through simplification, as Tolstoy calls it, of the customs, the clothes, the belongings, of the so-called upper classes of society."

"I say, what a jolly field you'll find us at Ballyrig!"

"That is exactly what I supposed," she answered, drily; "and, as you seem to possess some lucid intervals of intelligence, I'll thank you to explain to me, to begin with, the way things stand in my brother William's establishment. Ever since he married, three years ago, I have been making up my mind to run over, and have a look into William's affairs. Crossed at a day's notice, found him absent from London; followed him to Ireland; nobody here knows where he is; his servants treat me like an escaped lunatic; his wife lies abed at midday, and

sends me a message by a flyaway, pert maid, to meet her for luncheon in the glen at two."

"Awfully sorry, Aunt Loo," said Robert, penitentially, "but, you know, my governor's most always doing somethin' mysterious at the bank. And, as to Natalie——"

"Natalie! The vain, extravagant girl, young enough to be his daughter! The flyaway, fine lady, from what I gather the worst example of her degenerate class! Does she never get up to breakfast?"

"Well, aunty, if that's all, you know when you've been playing bridge all night——"

"I playing bridge all night?" interrupted she, irately. "Bobby Hillyard, you curdle my blood with the suggestion!"

"That's your loss, Aunt Loo. Come, now, if you want missionary work at Ballyrig, take my advice, and don't bother about Natalie. Go in for Sylvia."

"Sylvia—who's Sylvia?"

"Sylvia! Why, aunty, where have you been that you haven't heard of my governor's ward, Sylvia Ridgeway?—bar one, the loveliest, sweetest girl alive!"

"Not Clive Ridgeway's daughter?"

"Yes. He was an artist chap, an old friend of my father's. Died abroad, leaving Sylvia to be brought up in a French convent till she was nineteen. Then, my governor was to say what she should do, and so he went over there, last year, saw Sylvia, knocked under to her, like everybody else, except Natalie and her pals, and, by Jove! ended by bringing the poor dear over to live with us."

"Clive Ridgeway," repeated Miss Hillyard, softly, as if she hardly heard him speaking.

"Ever know the gentleman?" inquired Bobby, politely.

To his surprise, the old lady's face was puckered with an expression as if combining an inclination to sneeze with the pathos of a tender memory. She made two strides over to a fern-fringed boulder, and sat down upon it

—solidly, it must be owned—then wiped her spectacles.

"Yes, Robert, I knew him," she said, in a voice of surprising gentleness, "long, long ago, before he fell in love with a penniless girl who had no theories. Clive Ridgeway was, take him by and large, the best expression I ever saw Nature make of a perfect gentleman. He married. His wife was always ill. They wandered about Europe, he painting pictures nobody ever bought. I heard there was a child who survived her parents, but I did not know its name. Sylvia!—after his mother. Robert Hillyard, don't tell me that girl's like the rest of the people here?"

"You'll see! If you do get any influence over her, aunty, tell her not to fish any more with Sargent."

"Sargent?" queried Miss Loo, gruffly.

"The Sir Hugh Sargent, Natalie's own particular; and Natalie thinks all the time Sylvia's with Kit Vail."

"Natalie's own particular what?" asked Miss Loo, in simply awful tones.

"All Natalie's set have them," said Bobby, struggling, "the kind she'd tear another girl's eyes out if she tried to get him away. And the worst of it is, Sylvia's too green to see through this business of Natalie's, and now Sargent's taken a regular shine to Sylvia, and they fish together every day, and Natalie doesn't fish, and, if Natalie finds out what's going on, Sylvia will go higher than a kite. Understand?"

"I understand," said Miss Loo.

"If Sylvia would only fancy Kit Vail, who's dead stuck on her—but she won't, and, oh—Lord! there's nothing so obstinate as a woman, Aunt Loo."

"Christopher Vail! He would be Anthony Vail's son—a cousin of Clive Ridgeway's, and so of Sylvia's."

"Yes; near enough to bully, but not near enough to kiss," smiled Bobby. "He's a good fellow and a safe fellow, Vail is, and Natalie keeps on letting Sylvia fish with us, because

she hopes Vail will take Sylvia off her hands. Beg pardon, ma'am, am I making myself clear?"

"Too clear," answered Auntie Loo, groaning.

"Then you will take Sylvia up?"

"How, 'take her up'?"

"Be a sort of a kind of a mother to her, won't you, aunty?"

Again Auntie Loo wiped her spectacles. "You're not half a bad fellow, Robert. You spoke just now of your need of a small sum." She took out a pocket-book, and produced two agreeably crackling snowy notes, which she placed in his hand. "Oblige me by accepting twenty pounds."

"I say, aunty, you *are* a brick, you know," exclaimed the beneficiary, gratefully; "and I can't rest till you see Sylvia. She's the only person in our house that's really your size."

"Really my size?"

"I don't mean in—in circumference," he said, abashed.

"Why don't you say what you *do* mean?" she snapped. "Robert, is Sylvia the only other lady in your household?"

"Bless you, no!" he exclaimed, growing radiant. "If I didn't mention Maudie Fortescue, it's because you have to *see* her to realize her. If the governor would ever give me a chance at independence, she wouldn't be Maudie Fortescue much longer, I tell you! And, of course, there's Maudie's mother—Natalie's great pal—a very distinguished lady."

"What's she distinguished for?" asked Miss Lucretia, drily.

"Writing! Why, Auntie Loo, she's 'Dot' in the *Weekly Free Lance*, 'Portia' in Trilby's column of *Legal Advice to Women*, the 'Fair Financier' in the money article of *Fashion's Guide*, assistant editress of *Pussy's Magazine*, and 'Madge' in *The Haberdasher's Monthly*."

"Goodness gracious me!" exclaimed his hearer, helplessly. "And where's Mr. Fortescue?"

"Divorced," said Bobby. "Auntie Loo, here comes Sylvia. You'll see Sylvia. Why, by Jove, she's all alone!

Vail and Sargent must be having luck, confound 'em!"

With more emotion than she cared to show, old Miss Hillyard looked in the direction indicated by her nephew. She saw coming up the steep rise of the path, with a swift, firm tread, a tall young creature with something of the Springtime freshness, of the wood's vernal beauty, in her face and form. Sylvia wore a short skirt of tan frieze, with russet leggings, and a hat garlanded with salmon flies, and in her belt was a bunch of purple heather. At sight of the grotesque old figure keeping Bobby company, a flash of divination came into her eyes, and she quickened her pace toward them.

"You—you are Auntie Loo!" she cried. "Please, may I kiss you?"

It was as if a rose-leaf had fallen upon a wall.

Auntie Loo received the caress with a gasp.

"Why, such a thing hasn't happened to me in forty years," she said.

"Oh, but I've heard ever so much of you!" cried Sylvia, joyously, "and you'd never guess from whom—from my dear, dear father, who always said you were the truest woman with the biggest heart he knew."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Auntie Loo, rising.

"I haven't offended you?" asked Sylvia.

"No."

"Aren't you feeling well?"

"I'm always well. I'll just go take a little turn."

"Let us go with you, aunty," said Bobby.

"Not a bit of it, boy. I prefer—I'm used to being alone."

"At least, you'll come back for luncheon?"

"I take mine in my bedroom, in tabloid form," said Miss Hillyard.

"But just for to-day, you'll stop with us?" coaxed Sylvia.

"Of course she will," affirmed Bobby.

"Well, then, just for to-day," answered the subdued Amazon, looking from one bright young face to the other. "But let me alone for a bit,

will you, and I'll find my way back all right.—Sylvia!"

"Yes, Auntie Loo."

"They say you are like your father, don't they, child? There, now, don't answer me. I can't abide being answered back by young people. Take care of her, Bobby, till I come again. Do what Bobby tells you, Sylvia!"

The large lady vanished in the green wood, and Bobby whistled.

"I say, Sylvia, that's a gay old mas-todon. But see here, dear, I've a word to say to you, alone."

Sylvia seated herself upon a stone, and took off her hat.

"Then speak up, Bobby, like the pretty boy you are. 'And I'll do what Bobby tells me,' I suppose."

Bobby hemmed and hawed, blushing the while.

"You know I'm something like a brother to you, dear. Please don't mind if I ask you whether you're going to take Kit Vail."

"Take Kit Vail! Not on your life, I'm not, Bobby. You taught me that, and I'm much obliged to you."

"But why, Sylvia?"

"Oh, because."

"Because what?"

"Bobby, you're a nuisance. Dear old Kit! He's real, he's loyal, there's nobody in all the world I'd sooner go to with my troubles, but——"

Her silence was eloquent.

"That's the end of Vail, then. Now, Sylvia, don't be vexed with me——"

"I shall be, Bobby, furiously, if you say the silly things you began to hint at yesterday. In the first place, there's not the slightest risk of such a thing!"

"Sylvia!"

"He hasn't the ghost of an idea of wanting me."

"Who's been with you this livelong day? Who gave you the best pools to cast in? Think of that, will you? The best pool to a girl! Oh, Lord!"

"Bobby, you're rude; and, besides, you shouldn't spy."

Bobby shared her stone, and put on his most persuasive air.

"Sylvia, dear," he said, leaning toward her, "I'm a man, you know,

and fellows know better than girls about some kinds o' things. Take my advice—don't go in for Sargent. It isn't safe."

"Bobby," answered Sylvia, deliberately, "I'm a girl, you know, and girls know better than fellows about some kinds o' things. Take my advice—don't go in for Maud Fortescue. It isn't safe."

"Who said——?" began Bobby, guiltily. "And, anyhow, I'd like to know what fault you can find with Maudie."

"For one thing, she's years and years older than you are," said Sylvia, smoothly.

"That statement is beneath my dignity," said Robert, rising and walking off with his hands in the pockets of his Norfolk jacket.

"They call her 'The Baby Snatcher'," went on Sylvia, provokingly.

Bobby started, fiercely. "Whoever, in my presence, applies such an epithet to that noble woman, does so at his peril!"

The crisis was interrupted by Terence, running up the river path, waving his torn hat with rapture.

"Masther Bobby, dear! such news! an' you, miss, that lift him a bit too soon, I'm thinkin'! It's Sir Hugh that's just afther landin' the big, big salmon that ran Masther Bobby down the river. A forty-pounder, I'll go bail. Wirra, ma sthrue, but it's the beautiful play he gave the divil before he landed him! Sir Hugh bid me say he'd join you directly, miss. Listen to that, now, an' ye'll hear the b'ys cheerin' him below!"

Sylvia started joyfully to her feet, her cheeks glowing, and listened to the sweet music of distant cheering for the victor.

Bobby, on the contrary, was divided between excitement over the news, and a burst of native dignity. "Now, why in the world should anybody suppose I'm interested in Sargent's luck?"

"Because you honestly are, Bobby," the girl answered, patting him on the back. "Put pride in your pocket, go with Terence to see the monster, that

should have been your prey—then, bring Vail and Sir Hugh to luncheon here, and, by the time you get back, you and I will have forgotten that we ever disagreed.”

“But, all the same, you’ll remember what I told you about Sargent?”

“Exactly, as long as you remember what I told you about Maudie,” she cried, archly, pushing him off after Terence.

Then, the smile became overclouded on her April face, and her step lagged, as she turned back into the solitude of the little glen.

“Safe? Why isn’t it safe?” she thought, sighing. “How horrid of Bobby, just when I was thinking the world had never looked so beautiful!”

“Ah! there you are, Miss Ridgeway,” said a voice behind her. Turning, with a face again radiant, she saw Sargent revealing himself in active strides over the steep side of the cliff.

He was covered with twigs and moss, and had evidently pushed his way through tough undergrowth to reach her.

“What possessed you to come up there?” she cried.

“The shortest way to reach you, wasn’t it? Most unfair of you, I call it, to run away from a comrade, just at the critical moment when he couldn’t look around.”

“It seems my departure brought you luck,” she said, shyly, as he came toward her with decidedly a possessive air.

“Luck! What was luck if my wood-nymph did not share it?”

“Accept my congratulations, nevertheless,” she said, drawing back a little from the fervor of his tones.

“I beg your pardon, Miss Ridgeway. I forget that the idyll’s over. Jove! ’twas worth living while it lasted, though.”

“Presently, when they all come out to luncheon, you’ll forget the idyll. And that reminds me, the man ought to be here with the hampers. I promised the housekeeper to see that they lay the cloth properly. Don’t you think this would be the best place for it?”

She left him, going over to clear the fallen leaves away from a wide, mossy level upon the knoll.

“What’s come to you in this little time since you left me?” he said, throwing himself on the ground beside the spring, and watching her, discontentedly. “I’ll swear, I don’t understand it. All this morning, you’ve been a genius of the woods; now, you look like a pretty Puritan. Come, out with it, Miss Ridgeway! Somebody’s been poisoning your mind against me. As a general thing, I don’t care a—well, a fish-hook—what any one says of me. But, to-day, I’m anxious as a schoolboy working for a prize. Come, whom have you met? What have they told you? If there are any good and sufficient reasons why you’re to chill on me, for heaven’s sake let’s hear them, and be done with it.”

“How strange you are!” she said, looking at him, guilelessly. “I don’t think I ever saw you quite like this, before.”

He had pulled himself up on one elbow, and was flushing darkly. While her gaze rested upon him, he seemed to pass under a spell of self-control. She said no more, and presently he turned, with a laugh, toward the little spring.

“What a savage I am! And what a jolly little spring! Please, lady, won’t you give a cup of water to a tired fisherman?”

“Certainly; only, there’s no cup. Will this do?” And she hastily pinned together two large-sized leaves, filled them, and offered them, dripping, to his lips.

“Nearer, please. Don’t be so stingy,” he said, seizing her wrist to bring the sylvan goblet within reach. Alas! the cup parted, the water glided earthward, and he was left kissing her hand with fervor.

“Don’t, don’t! Sir Hugh!” cried the girl, breaking away from him, and going over to entrench herself against a tree bole opposite.

“I never intended anything less in all my life,” he said, rising to follow her. “Sylvia, you believe me, don’t you?”

"Yes; if you say so. But promise you'll never do so any more."

"Why? that's the question. Why mayn't I? Who is to say us nay?"

Then, a sudden frost came over him. He checked himself abruptly, and, with a short, brusque laugh, retreated well within the safety line of distance.

"Sylvia—Miss Ridgeway," he said, presently, "do you chance to remember how we first met?"

"I? Oh, how could I forget it?" she answered, innocently. "I have too little in my life."

"It was a foggy afternoon of belated Spring in town. You had not long come to live in Pont street. I knew only vaguely of your existence. I had dropped in to call on Mrs. Hillyard—she had not returned from her drive. You gave me tea."

"Very bad tea—French tea, convent tea. But I know better now."

"The room was filled with violets and narcissuses—"

"Yes; you sent them to Natalie; don't you remember?"

"Did I? I had forgotten. At any rate, they have ever since suggested you to me. At first, you were badly bored by my visit, and wanted to go on with your book."

"Because I saw—any girl could have seen—you were only condescending—making talk until Natalie should come in."

"I was properly punished, when you began by amusing, then piqued, then interested, me thoroughly. And the interest has never failed or palled."

"Then Natalie came in!" she cried, gaily, "and, in two minutes, put me in my proper place. She made me feel the presumption of a callow school-girl trying to entertain a man of your place in the world. I went out, feeling absolutely squashed—like a housemaid who's been had up for a lecture. After that, there was an awful gap, when I never laid eyes on you till the day in the Park. You rode up to the rail, and spoke to me when I was out walking with Natalie's maid and the two dogs."

"Next, came our daringly surrepti-

tious visit to the Wallace collection, where you forgot all about me in your zeal for pots and pans and other antiquities."

"I did think you rather old, at first. But I've long since got over that. How frightened I was lest Natalie should find out we'd been to that gallery, and scold me for letting you take such trouble to entertain a mere nobody in her husband's house."

"Then, Ranelagh," said Sargent.

"When you hardly spoke to me," said Sylvia.

"I couldn't," Sargent said.

"The next great occasion was the dinner at the Hillyards—a never-to-be-forgotten chance."

"When somebody failed, and Natalie sent up-stairs for me in a hurry, and brought me down in that shabby old muslin. Her maid had just time to pin some roses in. I was paired off with a grim old professor who thought of nothing but his food—and you—you—"

"I, by an accident of my own contriving, sat on your other side," he added, after a pause. "Jove! that dinner in that house was like coming from a hot walk to sit by this little spring."

They had unconsciously drawn nearer together.

"Then," Sylvia said, heaving a heartfelt sigh, "I actually never laid eyes on you again till we came here."

Sargent smiled at her naïveté.

"What Ireland has been to both of us! These long, delicious days on the river and the moors! Sylvia, before I met you, I hardly knew what a real girl is like."

"We are out now, I believe," she said, archly. "But, maybe, we'll be coming in again."

"The contrast between your sort and these maidens who know all things—the faded, bridge-mad matrons, the daring divorcées, the wives who excel in the fine art of skating over the thin ice of propriety and just not breaking through—is simply incredible. Ah, little Sylvia, why didn't I meet you before I'd been a spendthrift of my better self? You say you see a differ-

ence in me. Shall I tell you what it is? The difference between a man with closed eyes letting himself be borne along by a treacherous current, and the same man wide-awake, clear-brained, strong of will and of purpose, steering himself through an open, tossing sea."

"As you are now, as you must always be!" she said, exultingly.

"As you have made me," he added.

"Oh, I'm so glad, so proud!" she exclaimed, with engaging fervor.

"Then, you won't mistrust me—ever?"

"Why should I?" she asked; "especially when believing in you means so much to me."

"Ah, Sylvia, you do care, then?" he began, and then stopped, as if a door had closed between them.

He walked away and returned to where she sat, motionless, wondering, thrilling.

"There! I'm myself again. The Midsummer madness has passed out of my veins. I'll stroll away a bit and come back to you when the others are around you. But to show me I've not offended you, would you mind shaking hands with me?"

Sylvia placed her hand in his so frankly, yet with such a great lady's grace, that he took her finger-tips, feeling as if some passing royalty had bent his way in favor.

And, while they were so engaged, neither observed the approach of a looker-on, who stood for a moment, glowering, rather than gazing, through a thicket of young leaves.

"And now I really must keep my promise to Natalie, and pick out a good place to spread our feast," said Sylvia.

"Shall I help you? If not, I've a fancy to go down yonder to the water-side, and see if the gillies and Bobby have done the proper thing by my big fish."

He spoke lightly, conventionally, and, moving off, lifted his cap as to an acquaintance of every day. But Sylvia stood thrilling, a breathing statue of happiness. One moment she would

give to this delicious dream, and then——

A voice, a crash of some one coming through the boughs! To her surprise and alarm, she saw that it was her guardian, Mr. Hillyard, whom nobody supposed to be within gunshot of the gay household at Ballyrig.

"Why, Uncle Will, how good that you've come back!" she cried, running to meet him, and throwing her arms around his neck, impulsively. "But you're ill, dear. You've—bad news?" she added, seeing the worn look of his face, the haggard gleam in his habitually somber eyes.

"It's nothing, child. You are really glad to see me, Sylvia—or is this put on, the way you women do so easily? I'd like to believe you."

"Whom should I be glad to see, if not you, who have given me everything?" she said, tenderly.

"Sylvia, I do believe you. See here, my dear, you wouldn't tell me a lie, would you, even if you thought it would save me a great sorrow?" he said, looking her in the eyes.

"I hope not, dear. But you frighten me. Tell me about yourself."

"No matter about me. I've a question to put to you—a plain, rough question, from a plain, rough man. It's about the fellow whom I saw standing here holding your hand a moment since."

"Sir Hugh Sargent?" said Sylvia, facing him, fearlessly.

"I'm not one to beat about the bush. I've reasons, and good ones, for going straight to my point. Is it as your lover he has come under my roof, or as my wife's?"

Sylvia felt that somewhere the Summer sky had parted as with a lightning flash.

"Your wife's?" she repeated, mechanically.

"Answer!" he said, imperiously.

"How can I, when the idea comes to me for the first time now?" she stammered.

Hillyard drew a freer breath.

"Perhaps I'm hasty. God knows I'm a brute in manners. I ought to

have prepared you better. But I couldn't suppose you could live in the house so long with Natalie, and not know her little ways."

Sylvia held her head up. "At least, her husband should not be the one to teach them to me."

"Oh, I know, I know! The husband, in these cases, should do nothing but eat his heart out while trying to be a gentleman according to their code. I'm not a gentleman, perhaps. Sylvia, don't look so! If Sargent is not here for Natalie, it must be you. A man doesn't look at a girl like he did at you, just now, without some reason for it. Tell me he loves you, Sylvia. Tell me, and you may save——"

"Not even you, Uncle Will, shall drive me to the wall like this," she cried. "It is cruel, cruel——"

"Oh, these women—as obstinate as they are treacherous!" the man said, with growing wrath. "Curse him! I believe the cad's been playing a double game, and is even a lower blackguard than I thought."

The blood ran up into Sylvia's cheeks; fire flashed from her eyes.

"Don't dare! don't dare!" she exclaimed. "If you were ten times what you are to me, I'd throw those base words back into your face!"

"Clive Ridgeway over again," said he, in a bewildered tone. "Sylvia, he fought me once, and justly. I haven't forgotten that licking. Dear old Clive! Child, you're a perfect spitfire, but I believe you told the truth."

"I mean to be a spitfire whenever you're so wickedly unjust."

"Maybe I am—maybe I am," Hillyard went on, sinking upon a stone, and passing his hand over his brow. "But wait till you know the provocation. Sylvia, you haven't lived with us six months, not to see that my home's a wreck from the woman I've put into it."

"Please, please, Uncle Will——"

"Oh, I'm going to be brief. In this age, nobody listens to explanations. I'll get it all into as few words as need be. I've borne what she's put upon me. I see myself as she thinks me."

"Uncle Will——"

"There, I'm coming to the point. Over a week ago, I told her that I would be detained in town a fortnight. But I came back at once, and have been stopping in the neighborhood. Sylvia, don't look at me like that. I tell you, I *had* to know!"

"Oh, uncle, must I hear?" she cried, shrinking and growing pale.

"I'm afraid you must," Hillyard answered, with, however, a visible effort at self-control. "And I should also tell you that I have given her every chance—that I warned her to take care how she dragged my honor in the mire."

"Uncle Will," the girl said, shaking, for a look had come into his eyes that frightened her, "won't you do me a little favor? Come with me to look up your sister, who has come to visit you. Aunt Loo will be so glad! She loves you; she will know what to do."

"All in good time, my dear. I'll see Lucretia later. Just now, I've got to get you to read this." And, taking a crumpled paper from his pocket, he placed it in her trembling hand. "Read, will you? Let me hear how it sounds."

"It is Natalie's handwriting," whispered Sylvia.

"Of course it is. And, what is more, it was taken from Sargent's coat-pocket," he said, smiling in ghastly fashion.

Sylvia started, electrically. "And you ask me to read it?" she cried, scornfully. "Oh, never, uncle, in the world!"

She thrust the paper into his hand, and started to leave him.

"Not so fast, young lady!" cried Hillyard, grasping her arm. "What! not even curious, when it's addressed to the fellow who, a moment since, played the gallant to you? As you like! A husband, in my circumstances, can't afford to be so choice. I'll read it to you."

Sylvia struggled.

"No, no! I refuse to hear! It is probably just some trifle about our picnic."

Hillyard snarled, savagely.

"You think so? Listen!"

"Be in the Hunter's Glen after the others have scattered for the afternoon. I must see you. You cannot refuse me. *In memoriam.* Always,

"NATALIE."

"Call that a picnic, eh?"

While he was gloating over the paper from which he read aloud, he did not observe that Sylvia had turned her back to him, and was stopping her ears with two determined hands.

"No use, uncle," she called out, defiantly; "I haven't heard a single, solitary word."

Hillyard seized her arms roughly, and pulled them down, whirling her about, as if to strike her. Sylvia did not flinch as she faced him; but, when his hand dropped without touching her, she burst into bitter tears.

"There—there, child! Don't mind me," said he, returning to his senses, and trying to make amends. "I'm not patient, at any time, and I've had a lot of things to make me distrustful of even my best friend. I—I hardly knew what I was about. Don't *you* fear me! It wasn't you who put me beyond myself! If I came here to harm any one, it was certainly not you—Sylvia—poor little Sylvia!"

"Uncle, if you love me, come away; not back to the house, though, for we shall certainly meet the rest of them coming out."

"Asses and fools, all of 'em! my wife's friends!" he grumbled.

"Come, please, before they get here. Think of the scandal of an outburst before those gossiping people, who, whatever your grievance, will spread it far and wide."

"Let them! The world is bound to know."

"Before your own son!—your servants! No, no, uncle; you're not yourself, or you'd not dream of doing it!"

Her tender fervor overcame him. He allowed himself to be led into the path; then he suddenly stood still, and handled a blackthorn stick with ominous zeal and relish.

"No, my dear," he said, with a cunning look. "Sorry to disappoint you, but you're a woman. You fancy Sargent, and I'm afraid it's a put-up job.

Sargent's been playing a dangerous game, and I'm going to stop it. I'll settle with Natalie, afterward. Take my advice, run back to the house, play the piano, dress your dolls—do anything; only—damn it, don't you interfere with me!"

Sylvia clasped her hands, desperately. A moment, and it might be too late to ward off the catastrophe. Then, luck came to her aid, in the merry, boyish voice of Bobby, hailing her from beneath the cliff.

"Hullo, Syl-v-i-a-a!"

Sylvia ran joyfully to the ledge, and looked over.

"Hullo, Bobby! What's up?"

"Biggest sort of business! I've killed a beauty! Tips the scale at thirty-one. We're bringing mine and Sargent's up to show you!"

"That's right! Hurry!"

With his boy's voice sounding in his ear, Hillyard pulled himself together to face the consequences to Bobby of his proposed assertion of his rights as a husband. There was no need to make a by-word and a laughing-stock of his only son.

Hillyard stood, for a moment, uncertain; then, before Sylvia could rejoin him, he hastened away in the direction taken by Miss Lucretia.

"Victory!—but at what a cost!" said poor Sylvia, for the first time allowing her personal interest in the affair to come uppermost.

A triumphant procession now wound up the hill-path. It consisted of the gillies, bearing two monster salmon; was headed by Bobby and Sargent, wearing wreaths of heather around their caps, and brought up by Vail, undecorated, but philosophically serene. Simultaneously, from the castle side arrived two smug footmen, in livery, carrying between them a hamper, and likewise two large and well-filled baskets. In a short time, the glen echoed with the sound of cheery voices, Bobby's taking the lead in his joy of rehabilitation as a fisherman. When Sylvia had admired and praised his prize to his heart's content, and Bobby had fallen back upon Sargent as an

auditor, Vail took the opportunity to free himself to Sylvia of certain things evidently weighing on his mind.

He was a frank-faced man of two-and-thirty, steadfast of gaze, and inspiring confidence at sight, his manner quaintly suggestive of conviction that the world sought him for what he did for it, rather than for what he was.

"Sylvia, something is troubling you," he said, in the girl's ear; "something serious!"

"Nothing you can help, Kit," she answered, trying to smile, as usual.

"Sure?"

"Quite sure."

"Hullo, Vail!" interrupted Bobby, who had got hold of a footman, and was directing the opening of a long-necked bottle. "Come, join us in a hock-and-soda."

"And while you do, I'll pick a few flowers for the table," said Sylvia, going away into the wood, relieved to be alone.

Vail drew a long breath. Then, affecting to be absorbed in matters in the direction of the castle, he sang out to Bobby, mischievously:

"Hullo, boy! Better get under shelter. She's coming, with her mama!"

Bobby, having drained a tall glass of mild, amber liquid, felt emboldened to turn on his tormentor with hauteur.

"Kindly remember, Vail, that those ladies are my guests!" Then, with a sudden crash of dignity, he took to his heels to meet the new arrivals, still at some distance from the scene.

"The Baby Snatcher?" queried Sargent, lazily.

"At her same old game!" answered Vail, groaning. "But hang me if I thought she'd succeed with our level-headed boy!"

"He'll survive her. Many have."

"I don't know. The situation has its terrors, now that Mrs. Fortescue has joined in hot pursuit. 'Member the newspaper head-line, 'How Shall We Capture De Wet?' and the answer in our club, 'Send Mrs. Fortescue!'"

"Insufferable woman! But, Vail,

I'm not in the humor to talk of the Fortescues. I'm more than bothered about my own affairs."

"I told you, when you came here—" began Vail, but was cut short by the other, promptly.

"Bah! That's not what I mean."

"Indeed? I thought——"

"You thought wrong. You always made more of it than it deserved. I swear to you, Vail, it was only a silly, sham affair; a sickly, sentimental alliance of affinities, she calls it—some stuff she's learned from that creature, Godfrey. Gad! what fools we mortals be when we're too lazy to remonstrate against woman's whims! Certainly, since I have been in Ireland——"

Vail interrupted him in a constrained tone.

"I know what you mean. But the point is, Mrs. Hillyard doesn't."

"She has nothing to do with it. Kit, I want you to believe that I haven't forgotten what you told me in the smoking-room at Chelford, two months ago."

"That I meant to try to win Sylvia."

"Well?"

"Well, I can't."

"Are you certain?"

"My dear chap, you, of all men, who have known me all my life, don't need to be informed that Nature has handicapped me with the unlimited confidence of the other sex. Women respect me—deadly word!—borrow money from me, allow me to slave for them, but love me—never! Better far were I one of those reckless daredevils who rack the feminine soul with dear uncertainties. As a friend, a legal adviser, a best man, a partner at cards, and an adjuster, I have had my innings. Recently, I was even asked to stand godfather to a little, wailing unregenerate in lace. But, there my successes end. Needless to say, my charming young cousin is no exception to her sisterhood."

"Then you vacate the field?" said Sargent, trying to chime in with his humor.

"Naturally. But I may as well tell you, Hugh, that as long as you stay in this house, I don't give it up to you."

"Hang your insinuations!"

"Besides, to speak frankly, the difference in position between Sylvia Ridgeway, fortuneless spinster, and Christopher Vail, working barrister, is not nearly so conspicuous as it would be between her and a run-after man like you. I can't seem to see the possibility of your being in earnest in wanting her; and, let me say here, that anything short of dead earnest—*dead earnest, mind you*—won't do from you to Sylvia, while I am above ground."

"Do you mean that for a threat?" Sargent said, hotly.

"No," answered Vail, in the same cool, half-whimsical manner. "But I think I see you tottering over an abyss you are not prepared to fall into."

"I declare again that you are wrong. Of the feeble flame that once burnt between me and a nameless lady, nothing is left but ashes."

"On your side—but on hers?"

"Oh, confound you, Kit!"

"It's the forgotten spark in the forsaken bonfire that generally does all the mischief."

Sargent felt that he could no longer bear that quiet, insistent voice.

"Don't be Delphic," he said, rising. "If it's any good to you to know it, I have already informed our hostess that I am leaving her hospitable roof to-night."

Vail, too, arose. "That is the best news I have had. Hullo, here they all come. The Philistines be upon thee, Samson!"

II

THEREUPON, the sweet seclusion of this pet nook of the sylvan deities was profaned by the invasion of a rustling, chattering, brilliant little band of worldlings, constitutionally intent upon getting amusement from the passing hour.

Of these, Natalie Hillyard was easily the high priestess. Her type was distinguished, her beauty and good form were indisputable. Her presence exhaled captivation. Wherever she moved, the gaze of the looker-on must follow. Beside her, the high-colored and modish Mrs. Fortescue appeared coarse in the execution. But her eye was restless, her mouth unsatisfied, and the trained sweetness of her voice could too readily lapse into fretful chiding.

The three men in attendance upon the two ladies—O'Rourke, de Lorme and Godfrey—seemed content to act as foils to their elaborated art.

Natalie, little accustomed to control her impulses, went at once to Sargent, pointedly ignoring Vail.

"We are late, I suppose," she said, letting her eyes sweep over him, and softening her tones.

"Are you? I don't know," answered Sargent, in an even voice, audible to the others.

"How could Sir Hugh be expected to take account of mere time, when he's the hero of the day?" said Mrs. Fortescue, suavely. "That was what kept us—meeting your salmon on the way, and stopping to pay it homage!"

"As a matter of fact," said Hugh, "I have taken very close account of the time since breakfast. I am ravenous for my luncheon."

"Let us sit down at once, then," said Mrs. Hillyard, sharply. "Where is Sylvia? Mr. Vail, I trusted her to you."

"I will answer for her prompt return with some wild flowers to deck your feast."

"Maudie, too, is missing. So tiresome of people—dropping out. Captain O'Rourke, what became of Robert?"

"Godfrey, where's Robert?" asked O'Rourke, slyly, of the poet, who was making eyes at the dainties awaiting them.

"What? I know not," answered the gifted one, dreamily. "I see only the witcheries of this wondrous forest, in which I wander like a new-born child."

"Let him alone," remarked Vail; "he'll have cut his teeth by the time we come to eating."

"Robert should be here," said Natalie, complainingly.

"*Ma foi, madame*, if you will permit me," said de Lorme, upon whom her generally rebuking eye rested, "I would not wait on the missing ones. From what I observed, Mr. Bobbee and Mademoiselle Maudie will be for some little time engaged in the agreeable business of losing themselves like—what you call it?—'Ze Babies in ze Woods.'"

"I shall certainly speak to Robert's father," observed Mrs. Hillyard, whose frowns did not lessen as Sargent kept away from her.

"And I shall scold my little girl," said Mrs. Fortescue, smoothly. "Please, Captain O'Rourke, oblige me by going to look for those heedless children, and say we expect them here immediately. That way, wasn't it, where we left them, baron?" And she pointed, airily, in a totally opposite direction.

"*Parfaitement, madame*," de Lorme said, acquiescing; then added, in her ear, "but you are a genius——"

"I'll go, ma'am!" exclaimed the courteous captain, "and, bedad, if it's humanly possible, I'll fetch the dear wanderers home."

Natalie again approached Sargent.

"Sir Hugh, I have a word to say to you."

Sargent passed her, and went a few steps after O'Rourke.

"Hurry, captain, or the robins may have covered 'em from sight."

"Are you determined to evade me?" asked Natalie, when Hugh's laughing face turned back upon their group.

"Won't there be time enough for that sort of thing by-and-bye?" answered Sargent, wearily.

"Hugh, have you told Mrs. Hillyard about your exciting struggle with Leviathan?" said Vail, deftly interposing for Hugh's relief.

"Nothing bores me like big fish—excepting officious people," said Nata-

lie, turning upon her heel, and joining Mrs. Fortescue.

"Such a charming idea this of yours, Natalie, bringing us out to meet the fishermen," said Mrs. Fortescue. "I do so love nature, once in a good while. There should be a perfect view from the top of that highest rock yonder, if one could only get up there. Nothing like rocks and views for sharpening one's appetite. Come, baron, Mr. Vail, Mr. Godfrey; you shall all three escort me to that rock!"

"It is so beautiful here, I am loath to leave it," said Godfrey, starting from a reverie.

"Especially the food," said Vail.

"A little wind is blowing," went on the poet, now fully wound up to sustain his reputation. "Do you feel the little wind? The flower-bells are trembling on their stems. I do not know whether—I do not know whether—to laugh or to cry for joy!"

"Well, I can't wait till you make your mind up," observed Mrs. Fortescue, cruelly. "Come, baron; come, Mr. Vail!"

To her surprise, it was Sargent who was offering her his hand.

"Allow me to pilot you, Mrs. Fortescue."

She looked at him, blankly, then at Vail and the baron preceding them, and gave a half-glance back at Natalie and the beatific Godfrey.

"You really mean it? you, who are the last man in the world to play squire of dames?"

"Let me reform, now," said Sargent.

"Bless me, how civility becomes you!" answered Fair-and-Forty, with a laugh. "Very well, then; come on."

They had made but a few steps, leaving Natalie looking unutterable things at Godfrey—whom she alternately exalted as an apostle of certain creeds that she professed, and snubbed for an egregious bore—when Mrs. Fortescue discovered a sad loss.

"My pet handkerchief!" she exclaimed, feeling in her waist-band. "I remember having it a moment before we entered the glen."

"Shall I go back?" asked Sargent, conventionally.

"If it isn't *too* much trouble."

"Oh, no trouble," he said, departing down the castle path.

"Mr. Godfrey!" called Mrs. Fortescue, emphatically.

"Did you speak, Mrs. Fortescue?" said the apostle, arousing. "I heard nothing; I saw nothing, but this little, precious flower."

"Put the little, precious flower in your button-hole, and give me a hand up this rock."

Godfrey, obeying supinely, they joined Vail and de Lorme on the ascent of the rocks.

"Admirable! A *tour de force*!" said de Lorme, in Fair-and-Forty's ear.

"One must sacrifice one's self for one's friends," she murmured, aware, also, that she was sacrificing a brand-new pair of patent-leather shoes with wonderful high heels and "Old Strasse" buckles.

"Mrs. Hillyard will thus the longer forget the absence of Mr. Bobbee?" suggested the baron.

"Precisely," answered Mrs. Fortescue.

Natalie smiled subtly on Sargent, returning without the handkerchief.

"Well played, Hugh, well played!" she exclaimed.

"Did you really suppose—?" he began.

"Oh, let me suppose anything that comforts me," she interrupted. "It wouldn't be the first time you've thrown people off our tracks. You're not the only one who has to act a part."

"I am acting no part. I fully intended not to remain here alone with you, and I regret that I have to do so."

"There is no risk, as long as that impossible husband of mine is considerate enough to keep himself in town—but there's no time to be lost. Hugh, why had I no answer to my note?"

"Your note? Oh, yes, certainly, your note!" said Sargent, in what he felt to be a lame manner.

"Surely you read it?"

"Of course I did, but——"

"Perhaps you will give it back to me?"

"With pleasure," he answered, feeling in his breast-pocket. "I'm sorry; I must have left it in my evening coat."

"No matter," she said, angelically reproachful. "I fancy you did not notice the words, '*In memoriam*'?"

"Good heavens, Mrs. Hillyard, need we do this sort of thing in cold blood here?"

"Hugh! Your words pierce me like a knife! But I can and will bear all. It is my lot to suffer!" she exclaimed, tragically. "But, before you go from me to-night, I must have a final talk—I demand it—I entreat!"

"Please," said Sargent, looking around him, nervously, "*please* stand a little farther off."

"Yes? is it yes?" she persisted.

"If you must have it so," he answered, driven to bay.

"Very impassioned, really!" Natalie said, with a nervous laugh. "But I submit. Directly we separate after luncheon, do you go to the Round Tower on the hill, and I will follow. Then, as that is rather a damp and batty place, we can casually saunter back here where we are almost sure to be undisturbed."

"Upon one condition."

"And that?" she asked, shrugging.

"Is that until we return here, you will treat me in all respects like an ordinary acquaintance."

"Oh, certainly, Sir Hugh!" she said, the color coming into her face, and her eye flashing. "I shall begin by apologizing for having inflicted upon you, for so many days in succession, the bore of Sylvia Ridgeway's company. Of course, you understand that I am most anxious to have this affair between Vail and herself brought to a finish."

"Is there an affair?" he asked, indifferently.

"I wish Vail would once and for all drop the handkerchief, and let us have the fun of seeing her run as my *caniche* does, to pick it up."

Sargent restrained himself with difficulty. "Isn't that an unusually amiable wish for a guardian's wife?"

"Don't call me such horrid names! It's enough that I should have had this awkward creature thrust on my hands, and kept there—a spoil-sport, no doubt a spy, who reports me to 'Uncle Will.' Admit, Hugh, that the situation is one that calls for all my patience. Concede that I am quite justified in welcoming any circumstances that will rid me of her presence in my house."

"Any circumstances?" he said, looking at her, closely.

"Why, what do you mean?" she asked, and again the angry flush burnt her delicate face.

Sargent was saved the trouble of answering, by the return of the exploring party; Mrs. Fortescue, assisted by Vail, limping in, followed by the other two men, all looking mildly bored, as people do who are called on to survey the works of nature when disabled by lack of sustenance.

"Only think!" said Mrs. Fortescue; "one of my Louis-XV. heels got wrenched off on those horrid rocks, and the bill just came in, in this morning's post."

"But the view was magnificent!" said Vail.

"Was it? I never looked," answered Fair-and-Forty, with *sang-froid*.

"Sorry I failed to find your handkerchief, Mrs. Fortescue," said Sargent.

"Strangely enough, I had it in my blouse," she replied, giving him the faintest glance of meaning as she passed over to Natalie, and, slipping her arm in hers, said, in a loud whisper: "My dear, I hope you're grateful. The least you can do is to pay that shoemaker."

"Come, every one," said Natalie, crossly. "Sir Hugh says he is dying for his luncheon."

"So say we all of us," observed Vail, joining in a rapidly formed procession to the plateau that served as table, "excepting Godfrey, who never eats."

"Then it must be said, he acts very strangely with his knife and fork," said Sargent.

"The body—the earth-fed body—must submit to nutriment," remarked Godfrey, nearly falling over Mrs. Fortescue in his zeal to be seated; "while the soul—the spurning soul—takes wings to the empyrean."

"Beautiful! almost pure Maeterlinck," said Vail, applauding with two fingers.

"Baron, we'll take this end," said Natalie, placing herself where her flowerlike head leaned against the bole of a great tree, and trying to sign to Sargent to sit on the other side of her. But he lingered afar from the banquet, looking back into the wood.

"Who is it coming?" asked Natalie, impatiently.

A look of contempt came upon her face as Sylvia, again serene of countenance, bearing a great sheaf of wild flowers, was joined by Sargent and welcomed by Vail, who arose to meet and place her.

"Ridiculous! All this fuss about a mere Sylvia Ridgeway!" said Mrs. Fortescue. "But, my dear, I've news for you. It seems that this week, when you thought she was off with Vail, it's Sir Hugh with whom she has been thick as thieves—wading, fishing, talking, in the boat, on the shore—while poor Vail had to take up with Bobby. Clever girl, that! Deep, very deep!"

"Absurd!" said Natalie, curling her Cupid's bow of an upper lip.

"Certainly," said Mrs. Fortescue. "I always mistrust a girl who parts her hair in the middle."

Sylvia, leaving her two knights, came toward Natalie, offering her flowers.

"Have these? I'm sorry I'm late, but this is my excuse."

"Sit down, please," said Natalie, cuttingly, "and try not to make yourself any more conspicuous than you can help."

Sylvia's head became a little more erect; her eyes surveyed Natalie in full, but she did not speak in return. She walked deliberately over to the place Sargent and Vail were keeping for her between them, and, seating herself, talked to both men with animation.

"My word! but the young person is getting on," whispered Mrs. Fortescue to Natalie. "One must own she's improved by color."

"We are just remarking, Sylvia, how wretchedly you are sunburned," said Mrs. Hillyard.

"A slander!" exclaimed Sargent. "I put it to the men. Has Miss Ridgeway's complexion ever looked finer, more brilliant? All who agree with me will please say 'aye.'"

Vail, the baron and Godfrey all waved their napkins gallantly, crying, "Aye! aye! aye!"

"Please spare my blushes," said Sylvia, nodding her thanks very prettily.

"What did I tell you?" said Fair-and-Forty, to Mrs. Hillyard. "If my Maudie had such forward ways, I'd put her back in the nursery."

"Oh, Mr. Godfrey!" Sylvia hurried on to say, to cover her embarrassment at the women's spiteful whispering; "I owe you an apology for breaking my engagement to take you to see the gilliflowers in the keeper's garden."

"I thought Godfrey made it a point never to do anything between meals," said Vail, innocently. "Don't mind those gossips," he added, in Sylvia's ear. "We're here to see that you have fair play."

"Another time it might be easier, but to-day—" said Sylvia, showing the strain she was under.

"You aren't a bit yourself. What has happened? Surely I can help."

"Presently—when we are alone. If this luncheon were only over!"

"When is your new volume to be published, Mr. Godfrey?" asked Mrs. Fortescue, of the poet.

"Madame, I do not publish," said Godfrey, between two mouthfuls of galantine. "My words—my printed words—go forth like seedlings from the bosom of the flower to those who will comprehend me." And he helped himself largely to aspic.

"Editions strictly limited," commented Vail.

"Your things are rather exasperating, Mr. Godfrey," said Mrs. Fortescue.

"Just as one thinks one is coming to something improper, one can't understand a word. Here's the captain, but where are our naughty children?"

O'Rourke, breathless and heated, came into the glen in quite the opposite direction from that in which he had set forth upon his quest.

"Faith, I've rescued the innocents!" he said, reporting to Mrs. Fortescue. "Found 'em safe and sound, ma'am, but not where ye sent me lookin'."

"How kind you are, you dear man! Do sit down and eat a tremendous luncheon," said the lady, whose purpose had been secured.

All eyes turned to the quarter in which now slowly appeared the figure of Bobby, escorting a damsel too visibly his senior, and pathetically anxious to let herself down to his youthful level.

"Robert," said Mrs. Hillyard, with distinct displeasure in her tones, "what have you been about? You might have remembered that in your father's absence you are host."

Bobby, looking cheerful always, seized a large dish, and carried it around the circle, requesting everybody to partake of his own prime favorite, a pigeon pasty. To the other delinquent, Mrs. Fortescue addressed herself, coldly:

"Maudie!"

"Yes, mama," said the excellent Maudie.

"I shall have something to say to you when we get back."

Maudie, who well knew that this "something" would prove a rigorous inquiry into just how far she had been able to entice her victim along the straight and narrow path leading to a proposal, contented herself with meekly repeating, "Yes, mama." Then, seating herself beside Godfrey, who had just begun upon a portion of Bobby's pie, she remained in a pensive and appealing attitude, gazing at a sandwich on her plate.

"Faith, I hope you bear me no malice, Miss Fortescue," said the good-natured O'Rourke, searching among the bottles laid in the moss beside her.

"Oh, no!" she answered, loftily. "How could mere vulgar curiosity expect to fathom the communion of kindred spirits?"

"Bedad, it's not kindred spirits I'm after, now!" he said, beamingly, proceeding to mix himself a drink. "A wee drop with some apollinaris, Miss Maudie, to prove there's no bad blood betwixt us? No? Then, I'll go bail your mother'll not be so cruel."

Mrs. Fortescue, proving less than remonstrant to his proposition, they were soon tipping together in amity.

"Here's to the hair off your head, ma'am!" said the captain, glass in hand.

"Eh? what?" exclaimed Maudie's mama, clapping both hands to her elaborate coiffure; "why, you horrid man!" she ended, suddenly. "Maudie, love!"

"Yes, mama."

"Cover your foot, dear child."

Maudie obediently drew in the foot which Vail called her best feature—but not until every one present had had a good chance to look at it, and Bobby returned to renew his devotion at her side.

Sylvia, meanwhile, had tried to elude Vail's questionings, but ended by telling him enough of the cause of her alarm to make him, too, thoroughly uncomfortable as to the possible outcome of Mr. Hillyard's return. They agreed to take counsel upon the subject so soon as luncheon should be at an end, and Sylvia, in spite of herself, breathed free.

"Dear me, I'm forgetting my sister-in-law!" exclaimed Mrs. Hillyard. "She should be somewhere. Has any one chanced to see a quite too terrible old person from the States, straying about the woods—a reformer who writes pamphlets, and lives on little pills?"

Bobby turned upon his stepmother with surprising dignity.

"It's all right about my aunt, Natalie," said he. "Sylvia and I have looked out for her."

"Sylvia—always Sylvia!" muttered Natalie, stung by the boy's rebuke.

"Oh, Bobby, there she comes, now!" cried Sylvia, springing to the rencounter of Miss Lucretia, who, wearing her most uncompromising aspect, now came swinging through the wood.

Bobby ran after Sylvia, Maudie tittered, the men looked on in discreet silence, while Mrs. Fortescue breathed her heartfelt sympathy to Natalie.

"Is that she? Oh, you poor dear!"

"Nobody shall say I have failed in my duty to my husband's nearest relatives," said Mrs. Hillyard, quailing inwardly. "Besides, she's richer than William, and hasn't made a will."

"Oh, you do have the luck!" Mrs. Fortescue rejoined, plaintively, and, to be frank, begrudgingly.

Natalie, without moving from her place, stretched out her pink-tipped hand to the large lady, who had, by now, come up to them.

"How d'ye do! Hot, isn't it?" she drawled.

"Humph!" said Miss Lucretia, turning upon her the awful glare of her glasses; "so you're William's wife? Humph!"

"William will be so awfully sorry he wasn't here to meet you. When did you come over? Hope they've made you comfortable. If they haven't, pray mention it to my maid."

And thus exhausting her resources of hospitality, Mrs. Hillyard opened a large, white-frilled parasol, and, putting it between her cheek and an aggressive sunbeam, fell back into conversation with de Lorme.

"Now, aunty, what'll you take?" said Bobby, seating the speechless spinster on a log, and providing her with a napkin. As each gentleman in turn proffered a dish of some kind, Miss Lucretia surveyed him narrowly; but her astonishment at the apparition of the languorous Godfrey was expressed by an emphatic exclamation, decidedly to the embarrassment of lookers-on. With more than her former brusquerie, she declined all refreshment save the solace of a tabloid taken from a bag hanging at her waist.

Mrs. Fortescue, availing herself of

the first opportunity, went over to the old lady, and observed, purringly:

"I see you are surprised at Natalie's poor manners. Don't mind her. If you want anything always come to me."

"Humph!" said Miss Lucretia.

"You can't think how interested I am in your work—your writings. We must be sister spirits," pursued Fair-and-Forty.

"God forbid!" answered Miss Lucretia, heartily.

"Here! I notice you looking at Bobby and my girl. Poor children! theirs is the most romantic of attachments. His father refuses him all but the bare necessities of his station. Dear boy! So sad to see him wasting his young life in a hopeless passion, when even a modest income, assured to them, and the prospect of more, hereafter, might enable them to marry."

"Humph!" said Miss Lucretia.

"Of course, you won't say I mentioned it to you," said Mrs. Fortescue, discomfited.

"No," answered Aunt Loo, emphatically. "But I will send you my leaflet upon the growing prevalence of child-stealing in high society."

With a grunt, she arose and went over to the spring, whither Sylvia had gone to fetch her a glass of water, and where Sargent had followed Sylvia.

"Who's that one, child?" asked Miss Hillyard, as Sargent lifted his cap and left them together. "I like him, and yet I don't like to see him with you."

"It's Sir Hugh Sargent, aunty. Why don't you like to see him with me?" asked Sylvia, blushing, despite herself.

"Because of the cat's eyes watching you! Sylvia, this is no place for either you or me. By the way, I met William in the woods."

"Did you? Oh, how glad I am! You must have cheered him, dear aunty."

"I don't know. Of course, being aware of his peculiarities, I treated him with tact. In the first place, I told him he had nobody but himself

to thank for the mess he has made of his ridiculous second marriage."

"That wasn't all you said?"

"H'm—no. I told him it was notorious the girl had married him for his money. Then I added, incidentally, that he is as gray as a badger, and as yellow as a pumpkin. When I saw he wasn't taking my sisterly admonitions in good part, I reminded him that he could never keep his temper. What should he do, but bolt off in the rudest way, and leave me talking!"

"Oh, aunty!" said Sylvia, despairingly; then, she tried to check herself. "Poor Uncle Will is greatly tried to-day. To-morrow, things will go better between you."

"To-morrow I'll be on my way to London," said Miss Hillyard, with a snort. "Saturday, I sail."

"Not so soon, aunty? Think of Bobby."

"Don't speak of him. I've done with the boy! Look at him, gone over body and boots to that detestable, old, painted sham! No, my dear, I'm rubbed the wrong way; the whole thing is a disappointment. Come away with me to America!"

"Aunty Loo!" exclaimed Sylvia, startled exceedingly.

"Don't answer me back! I can't abide being answered back. Will you come with me or not?"

"Dear aunty, you are so good, but I really can't say anything so suddenly," answered the bewildered girl.

"Very well, then, you know what my asking you means. You'd be my child, and get all I have to leave. But there, you won't, and I wash my hands of you."

"No—no, aunty! Only give me time!" gasped Sylvia.

"Till nine A.M. to-morrow, then," said Miss Loo, as if ordering home a parcel.

"How good you are to want me!"

"Rubbish! Till nine A.M. to-morrow. Now, child, I'm going in, and try to forget this menagerie kept by William's wife. Don't follow! I can't abide being followed."

She made a stride forward, then turned back, with a pleading gaze.

"Sylvia, don't disappoint me!"

Directly afterward, she was marching away, ignoring Bobby, who ran after her, and refusing to notice Natalie, now a little scared at the result of her own behavior.

"I say, Sylvia, this is too bad, you know!" remarked Bobby. "I was doing all I could."

"Don't mind her, dear," answered Sylvia, gently.

"Really, Miss Ridgeway," observed Natalie, who had arisen, her example followed by everybody but Godfrey, whom they left eating, "I owe you thanks for your kind assistance in assuming the hostess in my place. Another time, however, please remember that when I require you to play so prominent a rôle in my household, I shall have no hesitation in demanding it. Until then, wouldn't it be more becoming for you to keep a little—a very little—in the background?"

Sargent, who heard the beginning of this amiable harangue, had taken himself out of hearing; but Vail stood by Sylvia, with indignant eyes.

"I shall not forget," said Sylvia, haughtily.

"See that you do not!" answered Natalie. "Now, as every one has finished, I think we may leave this place to the servants, and scatter, each one where he likes to go. Mr. Godfrey, will you come?"

Godfrey, rising reluctantly, was carried off by her. Mrs. Fortescue, with de Lorme and O'Rourke, lingered a moment by the spring, while the playful Maudie, having discovered a pendent grape-vine, insisted that Bobby should swing her; Vail kept by Sylvia, who was giving a few directions to the footman about packing up the remnants of the feast.

"Brave Sylvia!" Vail said, in an undertone.

"You see, I'm without defense," she answered, smiling rather forlornly.

"Not if you'll give me the right to meet insult for you."

"No, Kit, dear Kit!" she said, gratefully.

"Never?"

"Never. You're not angry?"

"No—only sorry. Sylvia, if I mayn't make your happiness, it is borne in on me that some day I may have a chance to preserve it. Count on me when that day comes."

"Thank you, Kit," she said, and smiled brightly in his face.

"Now, what can I do to calm this alarm you've worked up about your guardian?" said Vail, again his cheerful self.

"Follow Sir Hugh. Keep him in sight, as I shall Natalie."

"To please you—but I can't believe——"

"Do believe me! Follow Sir Hugh! He and my uncle must not meet to-day!"

"All right," said Vail, looking with concern at her perturbed face. "Hugh's not had time to get far away. I never saw you so broken up."

"So long as I know my poor uncle is not himself—that he's wandering, perhaps lurking, near us, how can I breathe free? Hurry, Kit!"

"Here goes, then—to please you," said Vail, inclined to smile at what he believed superfluous intensity.

He hastened off, and Sylvia, with a sense of relief, went her own way in pursuit of Natalie and Godfrey. Mrs. Fortescue, who had been watching her interview with Vail, shrugged her shoulders, and smiled, knowingly.

"I may be wrong, but it seems to me there's moral thunder in the air."

"*Mon Dieu, madame,*" observed de Lorme, "*what could be more natural? Have we not all the elements of the usual tragedy at hand?*"

"Who'll give me a cigarette?" asked the lady, selecting one to her taste from the baron's case, immediately proffered to her.

"'Tis puzzlin' me mightily, I'll swear," said O'Rourke, puffing at his cigar, "to know just how the land lies between our fair hostess and Sir Hugh."

Mrs. Fortescue glanced over at

Bobby, who was swinging Maud, within earshot.

"Maudie, love!"

"Yes, mama."

"Didn't you ask me if Mr. Robert mightn't punt you across the lake to the island?"

"That was yesterday, mama," said Maudie, modestly.

"So it was. How stupid of me!"

"Oh, please, Mrs. Fortescue, mightn't she come again?" asked Bobby, with a delighted face.

"Teasing children!" said the lady, in fond rebuke; "only this once, then. Take *good* care of my girl, Mr. Hillyard!"

"Trust me, Mrs. Fortescue!" was the proud answer. And, in a flutter of excitement, the shy Maudie allowed herself to be assisted from the swing, and conveyed away from maternal supervision.

"It is so good to have a daughter one can trust," remarked Mrs. Fortescue, with matchless readiness.

"With an heir presumptive!" said O'Rourke, aside, to the baron, who, in return, lifted his right eyebrow understandingly.

While this by-play was in progress, none of its participants was in the least aware that they had been seen and heard by the master of the house, who, upon intercepting the servants on their way back to the castle with the hampers, had informed himself of the movements of the party.

It was not a pleasant face to look upon that now and again peered uncertainly from the deep covert of the woods, then withdrew from observation of his wife's guests in discussion of her affairs.

"Now that we can talk undisturbed," said Mrs. Fortescue, in a comfortable tone, "did you ever see anything like Natalie's face, while Sargent kept sitting in Sylvia's pocket, during luncheon?"

"*Pauvre belle dame!* May she be soon consoled!" said the baron, lightly.

"I declare, I've no patience with her," went on the lady. "Why

doesn't a woman know when she's well off?"

"You would say, when she is blest with the love and confidence of so excellent a husband," observed the baron.

Mrs. Fortescue laughed. "Hardly! Just think of it—to be young, pretty, with all the clothes one wants, and all the cash; to have a town-house, a country-house, a perfect digestion, and a husband who spends most of his time in the city—now, what in the world has she got to do bothering with love?"

"It's not love I'd be callin' it, Mrs. Forty," said O'Rourke. "'Tis the twentieth-century substitute! Be-dad, if 'twas meself choosin', I'd ask for the old-fashioned, common or Garden-of-Eden article."

"Of course, there's the drawback that her wooden image of a husband's still madly in love with her," added Mrs. Fortescue, with unaffected commiseration in her tones.

"At Hillyard's age, more dangerous than your English gout! What do you say to going back to the castle for another little game of bridge?"

"Capital!" she answered, with animation; "but, whatever comes of this mixed-up business of Natalie's, it will always be a comfort to me to know that I've done my best for her. I've said everything I know to dissuade her from throwing away substantial assets like hers, in the very worst speculation known to woman. But she is nothing if not self-willed. She thinks Sargent belongs to her. She has no marriage-settlement, and I know what a wretched allowance the divorce courts give the wife."

Laughing together, the three sauntered off toward the castle, leaving Hillyard to his pleasant reflections in leafy solitude. Coming out from behind his screen of low-hanging boughs, the poor man stood at first uncertain, his face dark with wrath and desire for vengeance.

Thus, Sylvia, returning from her vain search after Natalie, found her uncle, and, to her dismay, was

detained by him forcibly upon the spot. Possessed by the one idea of satisfying himself definitely as to the purpose of his wife's meeting with Sargent, Hillyard was not to be diverted from the resolve to watch them from his hiding-place already tested. All in vain were Sylvia's pleadings. His hand, closing upon her wrist, she was forced into retreat behind the trees, and there held, as a witness in case of need.

That things had progressed so far toward an inevitable crash, filled Sylvia with grief and astonishment. But, through all, her faith in Sargent did not waver. She *knew* he would come out of it unscathed. But that did not prevent her realizing that the events of the day were somehow hurrying her to a crisis, and the outcome seemed inevitable, so far as departure from her guardian's home was in question. She must go, and in all the mists of her distress Miss Hillyard's offer arose as a light leading her to deliverance. These thoughts chased one another through her mind rapidly in the brief time while she stood with a beating heart, her guardian's grasp of iron upon her wrist, not venturing to look into his darkling, distorted face.

The ordeal was fortunately short. The two people they awaited came strolling together along the path from the Round Tower. A glance showed that Natalie was vexed, disappointed, trying to carry matters off with a high hand, while Sargent looked as Sylvia had never seen him, hard and cynical. To Sylvia's immediate relief, they placed themselves where their voices came but imperfectly to listening ears.

Natalie, on her side, had just cause for perturbation. Never had she so poignantly realized that her power—or what passed for it—over Sargent, had become a thing of naught. In comparison with his present manner toward her, even the high-flown homage of Godfrey, who, in secret, made her the heroine of his writings, was acceptable. But she was still sufficiently mistress of herself to put

spirit into her voice when she led her unwilling captive to the place of rendezvous.

"Rather clever, this flank movement of ours from the Round Tower. And how shockingly I treated poor Godfrey in order to join you there!" she said.

"Would you mind speaking lower?" he answered, uneasily.

"This whole day—your last day with me, Hugh—has been such a wretched disappointment, one long ordeal," she said, dropping her voice.

"After to-day, you will not have that to complain of," he said, in a listless tone.

"This friendship with you," exclaimed Natalie, with intensity, "so high, so sublimated, so much better than other people's loves—which, no matter how it has been misjudged, has been for us so long the high, guiding star of our two lives—how miserably, and, I must say, flatly, it seems to be ending!"

"Everything in this world has to end," he said. "Things haven't gone so smoothly between us, of late, that we sha'n't be better for any change."

"Oh, Hugh!"

"For heaven's sake, don't cry!" he exclaimed, in new alarm.

"What is left me, if you are brutal?" she answered, tragically.

"I'll swear, Mrs. Hillyard, I did not come here for this. And, unless you stop it, I'll leave you without the smallest compunction," he said, his anger roused, and he started to put his threat into execution.

Natalie followed him out into the open glade, near where her husband stood with his hot eyes fixed upon her face. She stood with her back to Hillyard, and spoke where he could now hear her every word.

"Oh, very well, then!" she said, curtly. "Not to delay you, I'll condense what I had to say. It chiefly concerns your behavior with Sylvia Ridgeway. You men of the world think you've a right to amuse yourselves plucking flowers of sentiment all along your way in life—even when you

find them in an Irish bog. But you cannot suppose I shall permit this to go on in *my* house."

Sargent's miserably roving eye caught sight, at this moment, of Hillyard behind the thicket. To warn Natalie of her husband's presence, he drew near her, quickly, and spoke in a strained whisper.

"Take care! Don't turn! Your husband's behind you, listening!"

Natalie, at last in receipt of the great emotion she had always craved in life, was for a moment completely unnerved and terrified. Gasping, she stood with white cheeks and lips that could not frame a syllable. Then, by an immense effort at self-control, she rose to the occasion, and went on, speaking louder and with distincter utterance.

"You cannot, I say, suppose that I will allow this to continue in *my* house; that, in my dear husband's absence, I could let you go on trifling with the child he has taken under his charge, whom he loves like his very own?"

"Oh, this is horrible!" muttered Sargent, but he could not silence her.

"I see you resent my interference," Natalie went on. "Perhaps you are right; perhaps I am wrong. But I acted upon the impulse that has always governed me. Go away, if you must, to-night, Sir Hugh Sargent, but before you go, in honor let that poor girl understand that her silly hopes are vain."

Sylvia, wrenching herself from her guardian's relaxing grasp, fled silently into the forest. Hillyard, his face parting with its somber fixity, held back, yet a moment, before revealing himself.

"It is not one, but two people whom you are insulting, Mrs. Hillyard," Sargent began, indignantly; but she held up her hand to check him.

"Old friends though we are, Sir Hugh, and you in my husband's confidence, I call it a cruel act on your part to have done this wrong to a girl who may be awkward and ignorant,

but, while I am here, shall never be defenseless."

"Well said, Natalie! well spoken, little wife!" cried Hillyard, in a voice of triumph.

As he came out toward them, Natalie, with a cry of astonishment, flew into his arms.

"Will, dearest!" she cried. "Now I can be at rest!"

"And has Sir Hugh Sargent, the polished courtier, the invader of weak women's hearts, no answer ready for my wife?" said Hillyard, as he stood with one arm encircling Natalie, she nestling to his side.

"For Mrs. Hillyard, absolutely none," answered Sargent, with knit brows. "Of you, Mr. Hillyard, I have the honor to ask the hand of your ward in marriage."

Natalie uttered a faint cry.

"You seem overcome," said Hillyard, quickly turning upon her.

"Who wouldn't be," said Natalie, with another strong effort, "after such a scene with an old friend, and with the climax of such a surprise as you have given me, dear?"

"Mr. Hillyard," said Sargent, with dignity, "nothing I can say now can remove from any one of us the pain of what has gone before. But of one thing I am distinctly sure—that, with all my heart, I ask Sylvia to be my wife."

"Do you advise me to give him an answer now?" said Hillyard, with a half-chuckle, turning to his wife.

Natalie's voice could not, in spite of her, ring true as she answered this.

"I? Why, of course. What have I to say to it, now you are here?"

Again, suspicion, never far absent, settled upon Hillyard's soul.

"Only that, before giving my sanction to the match, I exact yours," he said, harshly, his gaze searching her face.

"I—I consent, certainly. Why shouldn't I?" she answered, and Hugh saw that she was trembling with fear. "Sir Hugh, I can only hope that your married experience may be—as happy and congenial as—our own."

"Thank you, Mrs. Hillyard," he said, loathing the scene, and eager to cut it short. The last taunt had destroyed in him any pity he might have had for the beautiful, small creature's humiliation. It seemed to him that a woman like that must always be sufficient unto herself.

"Dearest, I've a splitting headache—take me home," said Natalie, laying one hand on her husband's shoulder.

"All right, dear little woman," the man answered, beaming with new pride. "We'll leave you, Sir Hugh, regretting any annoyance you may have had from a misapprehension of your courtship. I've no doubt you'll find Sylvia hiding somewhere near. She's a great deal to forgive me, but she'll do it, Sargent. She has a big soul, that girl—like that dear chap, her father. Our room will be better than our company, eh, Natalie? We've been through this ourselves, haven't we, pretty one? Good-bye for the present, then, Sir Hugh. See you at dinner, if not before. I hope Sylvia will persuade you to stay on. Come, Natalie. Off we go!"

He put his heavy hand upon her arm, and Natalie moved away in silent misery and shame. When about to pass out of his sight, she looked back at Hugh, beseechingly, but he remained motionless where she had left him, his eyes fixed on the ground.

One moment he stood alone; then, Sylvia, pale and unhappy, her cheeks marked with tears, returned to his side with an impetuous rush.

"Good-bye, Sir Hugh," she said. "Because you've been what you have to me, because I promised to trust you utterly, I've come back. When I heard what Natalie said, I was so ashamed, I wanted to run and run, and never stop—never see you again, or any one here. As it is, I am going soon—to-morrow. I'm going to America with Miss Hillyard. After to-day, you won't see or hear of me, but even the humiliation of this moment can't undo the past. And so, at least, I hope we may part friends?"

To this point, she had kept up bravely, her broken words stabbing his

heart with sorrow for what he had brought upon her. But, when sobs—great, honest sobs—of a loving creature in distress—overpowered all further attempts at speech, he felt that he had kept silent long enough.

"Sylvia," he said, with grave tenderness, "there are lots of things I might say to you just now, but there's only one I want to say. Remember, it's the man with a clear brain and wide-open eyes, steering his own way through a tossing sea, who says it—I love you, Sylvia, love you, love you! For months, you have filled my thoughts and swayed my fancy. Come to me, Sylvia. Be my wife!"

To Sylvia, life seemed suddenly flooded with refulgent light. She trembled, could not believe her ears, looked up at him, bewildered.

"I? Oh, how can I?" she asked, artlessly.

"Nothing easier," said Sargent, putting his arm about her, with a smile. "Begin this way."

He kissed her, and in that moment all the dark things of life seemed to take flight from both of them out of the wood.

III

THE nine days' wonder of Sir Hugh Sargent's marriage with an obscure Miss Ridgeway, whose guardian had given her a quiet wedding-breakfast at his house in town, after which the couple had left immediately for the Continent to spend the Winter, was revived by the Sargents' return to Chelwood in the Spring.

Some curiosity had been engendered among Sir Hugh's friends by a story that the bride, in accepting him, had forfeited an offer of adoption and a large inheritance from a queer old spinster. But this was balanced by the suggestion that, had she remained single, she must have gone to live in America as manager of a health cure. There was some desire among a few people to see the new Lady Sargent, but more to know how Natalie Hillyard and Sir Hugh would behave to-

ward each other under the new conditions. For, recently, there had been floating around the society of idlers who feed their minds upon petty personalities a new version of the causes that led to Sir Hugh's rather sudden marriage. Where it came from, who was responsible for its details, nobody was prepared to say.

Mrs. Fortescue, whom, naturally, everybody felt could tell everything, was virtuously indignant when called upon to discuss her dearest friend's intimate affairs. She also pooh-poohed the rumor that Natalie, in temporary need of a new interest, had, during some months, accepted the attenuated devotion of Godfrey, of which she was by this time heartily tired.

Now that Sir Hugh was back again, that he was probably in need of congenial companionship, and that, coincidentally, William Hillyard had departed for a three months' absence on business in the land of the Stars and Stripes, there seemed little reason to doubt that the things curious people wanted to know would, in the course of time, divulge themselves.

The Sargents, meantime, who had settled down at Chelwood Park, in glorious indifference to the chatter of their acquaintances, believed themselves immune from any necessity of stirring up society by giving or receiving invitations.

Sylvia and Hugh had decided this point between them, in the first days after their joyous establishment at home. Three people only did they elect to receive as visitors—Kit Vail, who came to them promptly, always his kind and cheery self; Bobby, whom they desired to watch over during this interim when it was believed that Miss Fortescue had relaxed her pursuit of him, owing to his father's flat refusal of consent to their marriage; and last, but in no way least, Auntie Loo, who had voyaged over sea to spend a week under their roof.

Chelwood Park and its wondrous gardens were radiant in bloom, and a full moon was impending in the heavens, when the change in the situation came.

In her usual meteoric fashion, Natalie Hillyard, accompanied by O'Rourke and de Lorme, appeared one morning in time for luncheon, announcing, with perfect ease, that she had determined to give dear Hugh and Sylvia a charming surprise that evening, in order to extract them from the lover's solitude, too long maintained. The idea had occurred to her to ask a lot of people down to a dance by moonlight in the grounds, with electricity, of course, to help out the moon's deficiencies, and costumes, or dominoes, *de rigueur*.

Before Sylvia, who had cordially hoped to be left out of Mrs. Hillyard's consideration in her married life, as in the past, could recover from the stupor of this invasion and announcement, she saw, to her chagrin, that her husband, however much it displeased him, had no intention of shirking the duties of hospitality thus thrust upon him. It was the first cloud on the heaven of her married life; but it was a considerable one, and, for a time, seemed to spread from pole to pole.

Natalie, exquisitely pretty, no trace upon her sea-shell cheek or brow of care or penitence, thoroughly enjoyed the excitement she had produced. She made a feint of assuring Sylvia that she need feel no anxiety, as even the smallest arrangements for the evening had been made by her. As they spoke, an army of workmen and caterers descended upon the place.

With her old, superb insolence, Natalie assumed supreme charge of the affair. Sylvia felt herself routed, pushed to the wall. Too proud to appeal to Hugh for sympathy, or to let any one else know that she needed it, she submitted with what grace she could. And so, the day dragged on, until an afternoon train to their nearest station brought the next relay of unbidden guests, in the persons of Mrs. Fortescue and Maudie, to whom the butler, while introducing them into the hall in the absence of the family, gave such information as was deemed desirable by the invader in making her usual *reconnaissance du pays*.

"I'll wait here a bit, Hallett," said

Mrs. Fortescue, in whose employ the new Chelwood butler had been, some years before. "Quite as it all looked in Sir Hugh's unmarried days! Hard to realize there's a Lady Sargent now."

"Yes, madam. Her ladyship insisted there should be no change for her."

"Very proper, considering what she was," said the lady, her roving gaze resting, for a moment, upon her daughter, whom their maid and bags were preceding up the stairs. "No, don't go up yet, Maudie. Mr. Robert Hillyard is staying here, I believe, Hallett?"

"Yes, madam, Mr. Robert and his aunt, Miss Hillyard—a very determined lady. She took to her motor-car and left us for town, directly Mrs. Hillyard and her friends arrived this morning. Mr. Vail's also stopping with us, madam."

"I suppose you don't know where Mr. Robert might chance to be, Hallett?" said Mrs. Fortescue, a genial sparkle in her maternal eye.

Hallett looked discreet.

"Mr. Robert *was* in the billiard-room, a moment since, madam, knocking the balls about, by himself."

"Maudie, love," went on the lady, in a dreamy way, as if she had not heard his answer, "you have never seen this beautiful old house of Sir Hugh's. There'll be time before tea for you to take a look about. The—er—billiard-room, down at the end of the corridor, has a particularly fine ceiling."

"Oh, I should love to see that ceiling, dear mama!" exclaimed Maudie, hastily tripping in the direction indicated.

The faintest adumbration of a smile came upon Hallett's shorn countenance. Mrs. Fortescue, espying it, turned on him a hard, cold, unrelenting face, and spoke with a voice to match.

"I presume you have hardly forgotten the circumstances of your leaving my service, Hallett? How I—let you off—from a term of years in jail."

"Hardly, Mrs. Fortescue," the man said, with smooth humility. "But I had hoped my humble offices as a

witness in your divorce suit would even matters between us."

"Whatever you've done for me, man, has been well paid for. And be sure, my keeping your secrets will continue only just so long as you continue useful—and *endurable* to me."

"I understand, madam," he said, cringing. "I hope the last batch of Mayfair personals I collected at the Butlers' Club was satisfactory? Believe me, Mrs. Fortescue, our literary partnership is to me a source of honest pride."

"Hallett, you are impertinent. Wait! I've a question or two to ask. First, where is Sir Hugh?"

"Sir Hugh and Mrs. Hillyard are in the rose-garden, ma'am, arranging for to-night," he said, with a meaning smirk.

"And Miss Ridgeway? I should say Lady Sargent, only it seems so perfectly absurd."

"In her own rooms, ma'am."

"Sulking?"

"Oh, madam!" exclaimed the butler, sentimentally. "Picture a young couple but recently settled down in their ancestral halls, after months spent in roving beneath the cloudless skies of Italy and France and Egypt——!"

"Hallett, don't be poetical!"

"Beg pardon, ma'am, but since I became a literary man——" ventured Hallett.

"A literary idiot!" interrupted Mrs. Fortescue. "The point is that since Mrs. Hillyard arrived this morning——"

"With her gentlemen friends, madam——"

"Don't say, 'gentlemen friends,' Hallett. It is simply impossible. Lady Sargent has not had sense enough to hide her foolish jealousy. A nice beginning, upon my word!"

"But consider, Mrs. Fortescue. My lady's but a young bride, and this entertainment has dropped upon her like a bolt from the blue. Wot more natural?"

"Spare me reflections, Hallett. I always skip them in a book," said his

late employer, abstractedly. She was thinking whether it was worth her while to meet Sylvia as a sympathizer.

"Sir Hugh has acted in all respects like a man of the world," went on the critic of high society from within. "He give in to Mrs. Hillyard's plans at once. Our whole house and grounds are now in the hands of Sprightly's men—the incomparable Sprightly, who turns you off a wedding or a funeral with equal alacrity. The affair, particularly the Dresden-china minuet, to be danced under different colored lights on the old bowling-green, will be a scene from fairy-land."

"Sir Hugh, naturally, has spent most of the day in Mrs. Hillyard's company?" asked Mrs. Fortescue.

"Yes, madam," smirked Hallett. "You know her imperious ways—but queenly, I call her, decidedly queenly. She ordering Sir Hugh here, there, everywhere, an' he follerin'!"

"And Lady Sargent went under at the first shot? Incredible!" mused Mrs. Fortescue.

"A headache, her la'ship's maid calls it. One of the privileges of aristocracy, a headache is, Mrs. Fortescue. My own impression is that her la'ship has probably been havin' a good cry!"

"Man, your impressions and reflections will put me in my grave!"

"Comes so natural to me, since I went into literature," answered Hallett, simpering. "But one word more for my lady, I'd like to say. She appeals to me, that young woman does. Consider her youth and inexperience! Till now, the couple has been like love birds on their perch—Sir Hugh, apparently, givin' no thoughts to his former life, an' she—blissful! But such is life! It is the common saying below-stairs, to-day, that this is the little rift within the lute!"

"Hallett, you *are* a donkey!"

"Certainly, ma'am. Only, I thought as, us both bein' authors, you might appreciate an apt quotation."

Christopher Vail, at this moment issuing from his stronghold in the library, an ancient tome in hand, advanced upon the pair, the deep dis-

taste in his honest face leaving Mrs. Fortescue no doubt as to the welcome she had from him.

"How d'ye do, dear Mr. Vail!" she said, offering her hand.

"How d'ye do!" he answered, without taking it. "Tea'll be served here, Hallett?"

"Yes, sir; almost immediately, sir," answered Hallett, resuming his manner of every-day office, and going over to the fireplace to unfold a tea-table.

"So nice to see you here," went on Mrs. Fortescue. "You, it appears, were the first outsider in the bridal paradise. I hope you don't mean to play the serpent, Mr. Vail?"

"Not when the rôle can be so much better filled by a lady, Mrs. Fortescue," he responded, brusquely.

Mrs. Fortescue's chagrin was masked by the entrance, from without, of Natalie with three supporters, namely, Sir Hugh, O'Rourke and de Lorme. The beauty was in high feather, and Forty's intelligent eye at once perceived that success had perched upon her banners. She greeted her friend with her customary nonchalant good-fellowship, casually observed to Sir Hugh that she had forgotten to speak to him of Mrs. Fortescue's coming, but had given instructions to the housekeeper; and ended by going over to take possession of the tea-table which Hallett and a footman had, by now, spread with a variety of tempting, small dainties, as well as the silver tea-kettle and its equipments.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Hillyard," Sir Hugh said, somewhat formally, approaching her, "but my wife should be coming down."

"Don't bother about Sylvia," said Natalie, indifferently. "Her maid tells me she's a rippin' headache, and mayn't come down-stairs to-day."

"Then I'll go to her," he said, looking anxious.

"Oh, but her maid told mine she had locked her door, and given orders she was not to be disturbed by any one—*any one*, Sir Hugh. Under those circumstances, don't you think you

had better bide your time? Please hand this cup to Forty, and come back for your own."

Sir Hugh, suppressing his impatience as best he could, complied with her request, and Natalie turned to Hallett, who, having dismissed his myrmidon, was himself about to withdraw.

"By the way, Hallett, we sha'n't want a regular dinner, you know. Give us a scratch affair in the veranda—hot soup, cold things in aspic, and plenty of fizz, at eight-thirty, sharp. Really, it's as if the weather had been made to my order—warm and bright as Midsummer. No sugar in yours, Hugh, and a slice of lemon? Forty, our frocks for the minuet have come. Dreams, perfect dreams! As soon as I decided to have this thing, I invited Lady Clanberry to be one of my dancers, and then went to give her shop the order. Not only is she coming, but she made her girls rush the order, and you know how she disappoints."

Hallett lingered at Sir Hugh's elbow.

"It's all right, Sir Hugh, about the dinner?"

"What do you mean, 'about the dinner'?" said his master, shortly.

"The order give' me by Mrs. Hillyard, Sir Hugh. Wouldn't you wish me to speak first to her ladyship?"

"No; do not disturb her ladyship."

Hallett vanished, and Vail, who had reluctantly taken his tea from Natalie's hand, and was drinking it standing, went up to Sargent, anxiously.

"Is Sylvia really not well?" he asked.

"Quite well," said Sir Hugh, in an annoyed tone; and, rising, he went into the library.

"It's too bad we're deprived of her charming ladyship," observed the gallant O'Rourke.

"It's my belief," said Natalie, "the girl's so rattled by the idea of having to play hostess, she'll never summon courage to come down-stairs."

"Fancy a Lady Sargent afraid to come down-stairs!" commented Fair-

and-Forty, hilariously, attacking another cucumber sandwich.

"Naturally, any function of good society would intimidate a raw, half-bred girl like that," went on Mrs. Hillyard, amiably conscious of annoying Vail.

"Faith, raw she may be," exclaimed O'Rourke, "but wherever the fair Sylvia stands, she's a thoroughbred, every inch of her!"

"In my opinion," Vail added, with deliberation, "after meeting the test put to her tact and good breeding to-day, Lady Sargent will, in future, be proof against any further ordeal—whether of good or of bad society!" And, setting down his tea-cup, he took his hat from a rack by the door, and went out into the grounds.

"Boorish fellow!" said Natalie, with a little hunch of her pretty shoulders. "Rather soon for the lover to come on the scene, even in France, eh, baron?"

"*Ma foi, madame*, in England he is always on the scene; in France, he has the grace to remain sometimes behind the door."

"I wonder where Sir Hugh went?" exclaimed Natalie, always as restless as a bird upon a bough. "I quite forgot something important about the electric lights."

She ran across the hall, and went into the library, her departure being the sequel for an exchange of significant glances between Mrs. Fortescue and de Lorme.

"What are you two up to?" asked O'Rourke.

"I am only admiring the way Natalie casts off her own share in bringing about this marriage of Sir Hugh's—the '*Secret de Polichinelle*' of the Sargent family," Mrs. Fortescue observed.

"Mrs. Hillyard's an old hand at playing with fire," said the captain. "Strange, isn't it, how that story's just got around?"

"I can't think who started it," said Mrs. Fortescue.

"Somebody who hasn't much regard for the consequences, when Sargent finds 'em out. By me soul, I'd like

to do a little fightin' for Lady Sargent on my own account," said O'Rourke.

"Make yourself easy; she'll never hear of it," said Mrs. Fortescue, with rather a strained laugh.

"Oh, my dear madame, she has friends!" And, with a little more than his customary elasticity of gait, the Irishman quitted the hall by the front door.

"How much does he *know*?" asked Forty, blankly.

"I cannot say," answered the Frenchman. "But this I do know, that since our game of bridge at your lodgings last week, when the captain had the misfortune to lose so heavily, he has become an unpleasant acquaintance for us both. I think I shall rid myself of him, and advise you, *ma chère*, to do the same."

Their conference for defense was interrupted by the return of Natalie from the library with Sir Hugh, and by the entrance of Hallett, carrying letters by the evening post, which he spread in neat piles upon a side-table.

"So cruel of me to rout poor Sir Hugh out of that comfortable chair in the library with his book and cigar," said Natalie, "but I've a conviction my electrician will make a mess of something, if he is not overlooked."

"I can spare you a few moments only, Mrs. Hillyard," said Sir Hugh, stiffly. As they were going together to the door, he confronted a side glance from Mrs. Fortescue, which made him pause.

She was standing by the table, looking over the letters, and could not resist the mocking, malicious spirit that bade her taunt him as easy game. Hugh turned abruptly back into the hall.

"On second thought, Mrs. Hillyard, I will ask Baron de Lorme to give you the benefit of his well-known taste," he said, distantly.

"Then, Forty, you and the baron come," exclaimed Natalie, angrily. "What *are* you stopping for?"

"Ready! ready!" cried Mrs. Fortescue. With nimble fingers, she had

taken out of her embroidered reticule a folded paper, and slipped it among the others on the table, which task safely accomplished, she was fully prepared to enjoy herself for the evening.

A few moments later, Vail found Sargent standing irresolute at the foot of the wide stairs.

It was a delightful living-room, that hall at Chelwood, with its great bow-window letting in the beauties of outside, its mellow hues of oak and tapestry, its massive, old-time furniture. To Sylvia, upon her arrival in her husband's home, it had appeared the very core of comfort in the large, stately house full of bygones; and here, oftenest upon the arm of Hugh's chair, she liked to sit whenever they were indoors.

These people who had overflowed it, unasked, seemed to Sylvia's husband an insult to her, and a profanation of their home. He had endured the long, tiresome day away from her, but now, at the end of it, every beat of his heart cried out for Sylvia. Some hours earlier, she had remonstrated against his submission to Natalie's caprice. He had answered her roughly; she had run away and shut herself in her bedroom. More than once, he had gone to her door, and turned away without asking for admission. Why could she not see he was sufficiently punished by the poor part he had to play?

In this mood, Vail, coming in from his walk with equanimity renewed, found his friend.

"Ha, Sargent, alone? That's good. I want to consult you. Do you know, in this upheaval of to-day, we've all been losing sight of Bobby? Just now, while crossing the lawn, I happened to look up at the billiard-room window, and there, by Jove, was our Infant, with Maudie standing by his side."

"Hang that girl! She here? Vail, that won't do!"

"You'll say so, when you hear all. If I'm not mistaken, The Baby Snatcher's venerable head was reposing on Bobby's shoulder!"

"I say," exclaimed Hugh, in blank dismay, "where's Auntie Loo?"

"Gone to town to avoid her sister-in-law!"

"She must be brought back!"

"She is our only hope!"

"What in the devil does Maudie mean by it?" said Sir Hugh. "I thought old Hillyard had settled her, long ago."

"Do you suppose Forty hasn't nosed out the fact that Miss Hillyard has made a will, dividing her fortune between Bobby and Sylvia?"

"In that case, it is obvious that Auntie Loo——"

"Exactly; and, with your permission, I shall now send a wire to those gentlemanly chambers she has set up for herself in town, to ask her to return to-night to Chelwood."

"Do so," said Hugh, with a look of relief; "but, on no account, worry Sylvia."

"Don't fear for that," Vail said, as he went off; then, pausing for a moment, as if by an afterthought, "by the way, Hugh, old chap, if I were in your place now, do you know what I'd do, as fast as my legs could carry me?"

"What?"

"Go up-stairs!" said Vail, smiling.

"Bachelor's wives!" Hugh said to himself, rather grimly. "I wonder if Kit has the least idea— By Jove, I believe that's Sylvia coming down!"

It was, indeed, Sylvia, in a trailing robe of white, girdled with gold and amethysts, at her breast a knot of violets, her splendid locks twisted low in her neck behind. She was leaning over the baluster, her face in shadow, and Sargent felt, rather than heard, her speak his name.

"Well?" he answered, not too cheerfully.

"*Couldn't* you come up?" the voice a little stronger, and full of longing.

"I think not, thank you."

"Then, I'll come down."

There was a swift rush downward, a billowing behind her of masses of gauze and lace, and a happy call from Hugh.

"Stop! Let us meet half-way!"

In a moment he had her in his arms,

and they came down, lovingly entwined.

"Want your tea?" he asked.

"Oh, dear, no! Had it long ago! What a horrid tea-table—all higgledy-piggledy! You have been a bachelor again all the afternoon, haven't you? Did you like it, Hugh?"

"I hated and loathed it, and you know I did, you witch!"

"I was horrid, wasn't I?"

"Rather. For you, that is, not for anybody else."

"Sit down, you darling, in our own big chair, and let me get on the arm of it. There, that's more comfy for a talk. Oh, Hugh, darling, *darling*, what a wretch I was, to stay locked in, and hear you tiptoeing off from my door! How could I ever give up to such mean, jealous feelings as I had?"

"No matter. You won't have them any more?"

"Never. Every minute of the time, I was just *dying* to open that door and throw myself into your arms!"

"Why didn't you?"

"Because, when I got over the wicked temper Natalie had put me in—oh, it wasn't all your being cross to me—you can't imagine how she tortured me, after luncheon, when we were alone a little while— I wanted to put myself under discipline."

"Rather hard on me," said Hugh, ruefully.

"We can laugh, now that we're happy and together, but, while it lasted, it was awful."

"I feel like a rag after it!"

"Now comes my penance. Not only is Lady Sargent going to behave beautifully to her guests, *all* of them, *all* the evening, but she's going to own to her husband that he was right from the beginning, and she was wrong."

"Let's talk of it no more," Hugh exclaimed.

"But I must!" protested she. "I owe it to you to tell you that, now, I *perfectly* understand your relation to Natalie."

"Sylvia!" he began, frowning, and rising to leave her in possession of the

Jacobean chair that had held them both.

"Please hear me, Hugh. I'll never rest till I tell you. The reason you bear with her so angelically is because she's my guardian's wife, and he was so good to me when we were married!"

"Sylvia!" he exclaimed, taking her two hands to bury his face in them, in relief that it was no worse.

"Oh," I said, "I shall put myself in his place, and say, 'I, Hugh Sargent, can't stoop to be petty like that foolish wife of mine. I'm under endless obligations to the Hillyards. I've stopped in their house for weeks, dined with them a hundred times. I must meet this imposition like a gentleman.'" Oh, Hugh, dear, don't tell me a man isn't bigger and truer to high instincts than a woman. We are little, and catty, and resentful. But you'll see, I'll be worthy of you! You'll see!"

"Sylvia, my own wife!" he answered, deeply moved by her innocent homage. "Run up-stairs, now, and get dressed for the evening. Tell Marie to do her very best."

"Yes; and I've decided to wear that Cleopatra gown we got in Paris, and your mother's jewels. Natalie *will* be surprised at my grandeur!"

"And then come down and take your place at your husband's side, as mistress of his house, during these revels thrust upon us. By to-morrow, Chelwood will be itself again, and all your troubles will have vanished, along with the caterer's folks and the Chinese lanterns."

"That they will," she said, radiantly.

"Oh, we're dining, I forgot to say, at eight-thirty, in the veranda, where it's cool, in order to leave the dining-room for the men to prepare the supper."

"Clever idea, that, of yours!"

"It wasn't my idea," said he, hesitating a little.

"Oh—Natalie's?" she answered, with a drop in her voice.

"It seemed a good one," he went on, timorously.

"Certainly, a good one," she an-

swered; "only, I think I might have been consulted. There I go off again, Hugh. Never mind! I'm sorry, already!"

Sir Hugh gathered her in a strong embrace.

"Sweetheart, you are still a child! Now, I actually must go outside, and have an eye on the final preparations."

"Come to my room when Marie's done with me," she said. "I am a little anxious about Cleopatra's sleeve."

"What is the matter with it?" asked her husband, smiling.

"There isn't any. Just a row of spangles. We must do something respectable with tulle. Oh, I do want to look my best!"

"In any case, you'll be the sweetest and prettiest Lady Sargent that ever stood here!" he said, in departing.

"If you think so—that's all I ask," she called after him.

As the door closed upon her husband, leaving the girl alone amid the creeping shadows of the beautiful old hall, she uttered a little cry, born of her overwhelming feeling.

"Oh, my God, how I love him! So much, that I'm afraid!"

Singing in her happiness, Lady Sargent fluttered for a moment about the hall, tidying chairs, cushions and books, as a nice house-mistress will, and in her heart rejoicing that her uncongenial visitors still kept themselves out of her reach. While so engaged, her eye fell upon the letters, and, with a sigh, she took up the small heap of them intended for herself. The thought flashed to her how little one cares for letters when one has all the world at home!

Then, the journal deposited by Mrs. Fortescue was picked up mechanically, with indifferent fingers. The blue lines around a certain paragraph failed to attract her curiosity. She thought it was the usual mention of the return of Sir Hugh and Lady Sargent to Chelwood Park. "Happy Lady Sargent," she said, within herself, "to have Chelwood Park to return to! Is it I, really I, lonely, un-

friended Sylvia Ridgeway, who has come into this proud estate?"

Another moment, and the meaning of the marked paragraph was blazed into her brain. Vail found her clutching the paper, and staring at him with wild eyes.

"Read, Kit, read!" she gasped, thrusting it into his grasp.

He did not need to obey her. Too often had the unhappy story been whispered to him, of late, by casual, curious people. He knew it had got abroad and was beyond recall. But if it had only been spared Sylvia!

"Kit, you don't answer. Is it true?" she asked, shuddering.

"True! Oh, Sylvia, where's your faith, your high spirit, your superiority to petty gossip?"

"You don't answer me. Then, tell me only this. Do they say my husband was there, engaged in a low, vulgar intrigue with *her* when he married me? Why should he have married me? Wasn't the world all before him where to choose? Wasn't I happy in believing in him? happier than in marrying him to fall to *this*?"

"Sylvia," Vail answered, carried away by her fiery challenge. "I positively won't talk to you while you are in this excited state. You wrong Hugh, but, above all, you wrong yourself. You couldn't be more overcome if it were true."

"If it were true! Then it isn't true? Ah, Kit, dear Kit, tell me it isn't true? He never loved Natalie—that way! Tell me only that, and I'll be grateful all my life!"

"Sylvia," Vail said, after a pause, while he chose his words, "Hugh is my best friend, and your husband, the man you have sworn to keep to for worse or better. Is it fair to either of us to ask me that question?"

"Oh, no, it's base!" cried she, wringing her hands. "It's Hugh, *Hugh*, I ought to ask!"

Greatly troubled, Vail answered her as if she had been an ailing child.

"Don't you believe that Hugh loves you?"

"Of course he does!" cried Sylvia.

"Why, not ten minutes since—" She dropped her head in fond remembrance.

"I *know* he does, with his whole, honest heart."

"What must I do?" she said, cheering in spite of herself.

"Dry your eyes, little girl, and I'll tell you. Your house, worse luck, is full, and will be fuller, of people, some of whom would enjoy no spectacle so much as that of the new Lady Sargent suffering from a fit of jealousy of a suspected rival. For Hugh's sake, for the sake of the happy life I believe you will lead together, I implore you to give no sign that the story has reached your ears."

"You are right, Kit," she said, holding up her head.

"Trust Hugh. Stand by Hugh, and that will be the best answer to suspicion."

"I will! I will!" cried Sylvia.

"That's better!" said Vail, taking the paper from her hand and putting it in his pocket. "Now the red has come back to your cheeks. Your eyes shine as I like to see them. Bear yourself like a soldier, Lady Sargent, and, believe me, you'll conquer yet!"

"Oh, you'll see!" she cried, breaking away from him, and running impetuously up the stairs. "Good-bye, Kit! I must run on, now, and get ready. You've put new life in me. I'm not sad any more—I'm happy. Why, I could fight a duel, lead a forlorn hope, trample my enemies under foot, defy the universe—anything—only to show the world that my husband is mine, mine, mine!"

Vail looked up at her, smiling. When she had disappeared, he sighed.

IV

EVENING in the gardens of Chelwood Park! Certainly, whatever might be said of Mrs. Hillyard's methods of accomplishment, her taste was indisputable, and the result as satisfactory as if she had been an excellent and scrupulous person, of the

highest moral standards. Even Vail, wandering about from scene to scene of her festivity, in his most cynical mood, had to admit the success of the fête as a brilliant spectacle, moving like clock-work in every detail.

The dazzling beauty of the dances on the old bowling-green, with its clipped hedges and box peacocks and vases, illuminated with subtle skill, had culminated in Natalie's "Dresden-china minuet." In this, Mrs. Hill-yard, Mrs. Fortescue, Maudie and the compliant Lady Clanberry took part, with O'Rourke, de Lorme, Godfrey and Bobby as their cavaliers, all attired in costumes of white satin, sprigged with flowers of gold and rose, looking as if they had stepped out of Marcolini's "Carnival of Venice."

Now, the dancers trod their stately measures in a flood of rosy radiance; again, they assumed the uniform tint of palest violet, and so on, through the gamut of colors, until, at the very end, in a blaze of amber light, they took and held the attitudes of a shelf full of Dresden figurines, as if stricken to porcelain by a wizard unseen in the boskage.

Applause fell like hail from the guests looking on. Then, as another band struck up a waltz, the bowling-green became invaded by people in dominoes and masks. Five Pierrots, with linked hands, ran about laughing, capering and playing pranks. Suddenly, seized by a spirit of daring, these youngsters undertook to bar the way before an arch of evergreen at the entrance of a long alley leading to the house, demanding that every one who came through it should pay toll by a dance with them.

The first victim, as it turned out, was a foeman worthy of the steel of even the "Invincible Pierrots." Bobby Hillyard, after being told off by Natalie to fill the place and wear the costume of Maudie's intended partner in the minuet—unfortunately detained in town by the cutting of a wisdom tooth—felt that, for once, Fortune had played into his hands. Certain conclusions reached by Miss Fortescue

and himself during their prolonged interview in the billiard-room before dinner, had fired his blood, and inspired his heart to any deed demanding action.

As Maudie and he strolled down the cedar walk, and through the arch, unconscious of lurking forms on the other side, Bobby was overheard to say:

"This way, dearest. I know where you can rest."

"Dearest! oh, my heart!" whispered one of the listening Pierrots.

"Anywhere with you, Robert!" Maudie's voice made answer.

There was a stifled burst of laughter. The Pierrots bounded out to surround the incoming couple, and clamorously demanded their toll. Bobby, on hearing the extent of the penalty, threw off his domino, and allowed them to ring him in, all dancing together in mad merriment. Soon, it became evident to the Invincible Pierrots that they had been out-generaled, Bobby continuing to perform surprising feats of agility after each of them in turn had fallen out of the fray, panting and forceless. While the shy Maudie sat masked on a bench, looking on, the Pierrots fell upon a servant passing with a bottle of champagne and glasses, and drank unanimously to the health and welfare of their gallant captive, who was then allowed to pass on with his fair one to another part of the garden.

The next footstep to fall upon the ear of the Pierrots was a ponderous one. It heralded the appearance, beneath the arch, of what they took to be the most remarkable travesty of the evening—a personage of ample dimensions and great height, equipped in an automobilist's outfit, including eye-goggles, who, on arrival among them, spoke with authority to a footman following.

"There, get along with you, young man," said a strident voice. "No need to pilot me around this lunatic asylum. Just see that my chauffeur gets a bite to eat, will you, and tell them to keep my machine waiting first in the line at the lodge-gate!"

"Capital!" cried a Pierrot.

"Immense, simply immense!" cried another.

"Sooner or later, it will be torn from us by Madame Tussaud," exclaimed a third.

"Fair being, receive our homage!" cried out a young fellow, kneeling fantastically at the apparition's feet.

"Receive all our homages!"

They knelt in a circle, then arose, prancing and uttering their war-cry:

"We are the Invincible Pierrots. Dance! dance! dance!"

Miss Lucretia Hillyard, at first indignant, was forced into taking a few steps; then, breaking through their line, she faced them, panting.

"You're a pretty set of madcaps, aren't you?" she asked. "You're far too idiotic to get angry with, but, I'd have you to know, I'm not masquerading; I'm simply in the everyday costume of a lady out for a moonlight spin, who came down to Chelwood for the purpose of looking after a young relative believed to be making even more of a fool of himself than nature intended. I am told he was seen going in this direction. Under these circumstances, I trust the Invincible Pierrots will see the propriety of not interrupting me further."

There was something in her tone that commanded respect, and the Pierrots, one and all, lined up like gentlemen.

"Whom have we the honor of addressing?" asked their leader.

"I forgot to say that I'm Lady Sargent's aunt," observed Miss Hillyard, blandly.

The Pierrots, muttering apologies, fled incontinently. Auntie Loo, looking after them with twinkling eyes, decided to rest upon a tempting seat within a rose-arbor at hand, before resuming her quest of Robert.

"Bless me! I haven't cut the pigeon wing in a hundred years!" she said. "I must get my wind again, for the charge on Bobby."

As she ensconced herself in a nook created for youth and tender sentiment, the old lady's face grew grim.

She heard the approaching Bobby's voice, in earnest conversation, and what he said was plainly audible.

"Hang these people for taking that place I wanted! No, Maudie, don't try to change now. My mind's made up. Nobody shall say I've ridden at a fence I'm afraid to take! I may break my neck going over it, but at least I won't have shirked!"

"Right stuff!" muttered Auntie Loo, hesitating greatly whether or not to declare her presence as the couple strayed into the moonlit bit of path, full in her line of vision. But Maudie's answer decided her to keep silence.

"Dearest, have you considered all the consequences of our rash action?"

"What are consequences, beside you and happiness?" answered the lad.

"Your—your father?" ventured the lady.

"He's sworn he'll disinherit me if I marry you, but what's that, provided I have you, and you have me?"

"Nothing; of course not," said she, faintly, "since there's your aunt——"

"Auntie Loo?" repeated Bobby.

"Yes, hasn't she said—doesn't she mean to leave you half her fortune?"

"Haven't heard of it!" responded he, cheerfully. "She might be good for a wedding-present, the dear old lady might, but I'll be hanged if I begin married life by sponging on her for a living."

"Oh!" answered Maudie, in a deeply disappointed tone. "Perhaps, Robert, we are too rash—too daring. Let us wait——"

"Wait! What for? You wrote me you'd join me here to-night, and told me to get everything ready. I've the special license in my pocket. We'll slip into the house now, and change our clothes. These dominoes, the crowd, are in our favor. The motor-car I ordered from town is waiting at the lodge-gate. We can get off like a streak of lightning. I'll take you straight to your friend in Mount street, then go to my hotel, and tomorrow we'll be married hard and

fast! Come, Maudie, cheer up! If the worst comes to the worst, I won't be the first fellow that's had to work for the girl he loves."

"Families rarely hold out," said Maudie; "but—but——"

"No 'buts'!" cried the gallant Bobby. "It's all settled, I tell you. Take me now or never! Come!"

"Oh, Robert!" began the still doubtful bride-elect; but her remonstrance was lost to Miss Lucretia's ear, by Bobby's hurrying her away. As the two dominoes disappeared up the cedar walk, Aunty Loo emerged from her retirement, with a queer look on her face.

"Nice boy, that! Worth saving!" She paused, for a moment, thinking. "'Now or never.' Poor, fleeced lamb! H'm! 'Motor-car waiting at the gate! So's mine waiting at the gate. Well, as we say in America, though I wouldn't let Bobby hear me speak it, 'What's the matter with *my* driving that party up to town?'"

With a brisk step, the grotesque figure marched away into the shadows, turning up a side-path just in time to avoid meeting Sylvia, gorgeous in her Cleopatra gown, who had begged Vail to take her for a few moments out of the crowd to where it was cool and restful.

"How delicious!" the girl exclaimed, when they reached the rose-arbor. "Kit, I think I could never weary of the nooks in this dear old garden. . . . But you have not once told me how you like my dress!"

"It may be the costumer's idea of Cleopatra, right enough," said the truthful Vail, "but it's all out as to facts. And, besides, it isn't Sylvia."

"Crusty fellow! I knew you'd say so. I felt that when I first took it from the box. We had ordered it from Paris for a fancy ball at Cannes, where I ended by going as a fisher-girl in a stuff petticoat—price, fifteen francs—a bodice compounded by my maid, a peasant's neck-handkerchief, and any quantity of coral beads bought on the quay!"

"You are over-tired," Vail said,

looking at the charming vision—how charming to him he dared not let her know!—with solicitude.

She was apparently keyed to the highest pitch of excitement. The evening had proved to her more than a success. She had been like a boat tossed from wave to wave of flattery and adulation. The mistress of Chelwood had, indeed, taken her new place dashingly.

"Don't say anything to make me drop!" cried she, "or I'll go down like an omelette soufflée."

"You've been splendid," Vail went on. "Again and again, I've seen Hugh's eyes turn to you with pride."

"To the costumer's idea of Cleopatra, you mean?" she said, with a happy smile.

"Your jewels, too, are the best in sight!"

"Now, that is something like a Kit!" she exclaimed, joyously. "They are Hugh's family-jewels, of course. I knew they'd be a surprise, even to him. I had told him I could never fancy myself daring to put them all on!"

"Ah, well, *my* Sylvia will always wear a hat trimmed with salmon-flies."

"And a very muddy skirt and squashing boots," she added. "Kit, in those days at Ballyrig, I didn't have to dress up and make a show of myself to prove that I'd a right to my place in life."

"No, dear, but, after to-night, you may defy the gossips, frustrate their knavish tricks, and all the rest of it. In this world we live in, if you want to avoid slander, better disport yourself in the broad light of public notice. Dance, sing, laugh, where all may look on. No one ever sympathizes with the ones who sigh alone in the shadows."

"Kit, that sounded almost bitter."

"Nonsense, I'm not bitter. I'm only wondering when supper's to be."

"As soon as they've had the barn-dance, and that's next on the programme. I'm engaged for it to dear old Sir Claud Doncaster."

"Your heart is lighter, Sylvia?"

"Yes, thanks to you. If you're bitter sometimes, you're always a tonic, Kit. Then, those subtle flatteries about my looks, my jewels—I saw through them, but I rose to the bait, and it agreed with me."

"I'm glad I've put you in my debt."

"Why?"

"Because I want a promise from you in return."

"What is it?"

"That you'll forget Mrs. Fortescue's treachery, and Natalie's insolence, and not speak to Hugh of either."

"I won't speak to Hugh, if you like, Kit, though the trouble is, he sees into my heart! But don't ask me not to treat myself to putting those two women back into their proper places, for I *must*."

"Don't, Sylvia! Let sleeping dogs lie."

"I must, I tell you, Kit. I'm only human, and very feminine. Besides, how can I fear them, or any one, so long as I've got Hugh?"

"How my lady feels her power!"

"Of course she does. I'm proud as a peacock, and strong as a giant—*so long as I've got Hugh!* Now, Kit, I've had a breath of fresh air, take me back to the barn-dance, or my dear old partner will never approve of me again!"

In another part of the garden, Natalie had bid the participants in her Dresden-china minuet await her for a grand entry to supper in procession, and here Mrs. Fortescue, de Lorme and O'Rourke were first at the tryst.

"How is it with yourself, de Lorme? For me, I'm deuced tired o' bein' a Chaney image!" said the Irishman, laughing as he mopped his brow, after dancing. "I wish they'd put me on the shelf."

"Has any one seen Natalie?" interrupted Mrs. Fortescue, in a vexed tone. "Surely, she should be here by this."

"I had a glimpse of her a few moments since," said de Lorme, with emphasis, "going into the long walk toward the fish-pond."

"The only dark walk—*alone?*" asked Fair-and-Forty, eagerly.

"Not alone," said the baron. "She was with our host."

"How provoking of her! But everything has gone wrong with me this evening. Just now, I was called into the house by a telegram about my husband."

"Your late husband?" asked O'Rourke, with studied simplicity.

"Oh, dear, no! *Ex*—not *late*. This time, it seems, he is dangerously ill. If anything happens to him, my alimony stops."

"Let us pray for the preservation of his valuable life," said the captain, piously.

"Oh, but he always does everything he can to spite me," pursued Mrs. Fortescue, in a melancholy tone. "It would be just like him to go and die!"

"Take it aisy, ma'am. It's always darkest just before the dawn," said O'Rourke, consolingly. "Grand success, this ball! Did you see how my Lady Sargent swept all before her? She that expected to be queen of the evenin' was outshone entoirely."

"But she has taken an early revenge," answered Mrs. Fortescue, maliciously. "Don't speak to me of that under-bred Sylvia Ridgeway! Why, the way she's given some of her guests the cold shoulder to-night, is simply scandalous."

"Fortune of war, Mrs. Fortescue. You and I are old soldiers. Isn't repulse what we expect, when we go raidin' in the enemy's country?"

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean? When she was nobody, I was always Sylvia's friend."

"O Friendship, what crimes are committed in thy name!" went on O'Rourke, meaningly.

"Really, Captain O'Rourke," said the lady, with an assumption of innocence attacked, "I am just a little tired of your insinuations. The baron, here, agrees with me."

"But certainly, madame," said de Lorme, ranging himself beside her, and casting a vengeful look at the captain, "I, too, am very tired of them."

"When we get back to town," went on Mrs. Fortescue, "I'm afraid I sha'n't see as much of you in the future, as in the past."

"As you like, ma'am," answered O'Rourke, imperturbably. "Certainly, I should not think Baron de Lorme would ask to see too much of me. If he did, I should be only too happy to exchange any compliments he can suggest. But, if the two of ye'd take my advice, ye'd not be tarrying overlong at Chelwood. It's my candid opinion, this air's not the wholesomest for ye."

"Nonsense! You're impertinent. What have I to fear?" began Mrs. Fortescue, visibly nervous.

She was interrupted by the arrival of Hallett, pausing at her elbow, his usual smug serenity completely ruffled.

"If you please, madam," said the butler, "it is my duty to inform you that Miss Fortescue has eloped with Master Robert!"

Mrs. Fortescue tried to turn pale, but her rouge would not admit of it. She also tried to look overwhelmed with grief, and only succeeded in keeping her satisfaction within decent bounds.

"Eloped! Impossible!" she exclaimed, then added, unconsciously, "Maudie would never have had the pluck. Go on, Hallett. Tell me what you know?"

"I had just stepped down to the lodge-gate, madam, to serve a little refreshment to a pal of mine who couldn't leave his 'orses, when I see two dominoes—one of 'em carryin' a lady's dressing-bag and a gentleman's kit as looked familiar. They came stealing down under the laurels and out by the side-gate into the driveway. A motor-car was blocking the way first in the line of carriages, but the chauffeur was nowhere in sight. Quick as a flash, the domino tossed the two bags into it, assisted the other to get into the car, and then called out for the chauffeur—most impatiently, and with an expression I'd scorn to use myself."

"Go on, Hallett. Tell us exactly what occurred!"

"He called out to know where his damned, loafing motorman was hidin'.

I knew Master Robert's voice in an instant, ma'am. Then, running out of the bushes, came the chauffeur. I'm blest if ever I see such a queer figure of a man! He popped into his seat—there was a moment of delay——"

"But they got off—they got off?" queried Maudie's mama, anxiously.

"Lord love you, ma'am, they did—in a whiff," answered her minion, dropping into homely vernacular; then, recovering himself, "while I was standing, open-mouthed, as one might say. At the very moment of leaving, I heard Miss Fortescue exclaim, 'Oh, Robert!' and then I knew my suspicions was correct."

"Don't faint, Mrs. Fortescue!" said O'Rourke, smiling. De Lorme, readjusting his eye-glasses, offered his aid in recovering her lost treasure, and Hallett stood statuesquely by.

"Any orders, ma'am?" he said, professionally.

"I must think," answered she, feigning emotion. "My naughty, impulsive child—only a dressing-bag! Of course, she will send home for her things. Go away, Hallett, and don't open your lips about this affair till I give you leave."

"Yes, Mrs. Fortescue," the man answered.

"I said, *don't open your lips*. You understand?"

"I understand," he repeated, backing out, nervously, as she took two steps toward him.

"Now, I can't tell her that I considered it my duty to inform my lady, *first*," passed through his perturbed mind. "Neither is this the time to obey orders, and put into her hands the note Sir Hugh give me to give my lady, before he left the rooms with Mrs. Hill-yard kinder sudden like, a while ago." And Hallett fairly ran away.

"Heavens! what an evening of emotions!" exclaimed Mrs. Fortescue, triumph rising in her voice. "I'd like to see Sylvia Ridgeway's face, when she hears Maudie has married Bobby!"

At that moment, Sylvia, erect, fearless, trailing her splendid draperies behind her, swept down upon them. The

two men instinctively fell back, leaving her face to face with her enemy.

"You wish to see me, Mrs. Fortescue?" asked Lady Sargent, in a cold, contemptuous tone.

"It is evident you know what has occurred," answered Mrs. Fortescue, disagreeably taken by surprise.

"Yes, I have heard of the success of your plot to entrap my cousin," said Sylvia, indignantly.

"Don't you think, since our families are now to be allied, it would be more graceful for us to accept the situation like women of the world?" asked Forty, in an insinuating, but patronizing, tone.

"I do not call myself a woman of your world. That you have strayed from its limits into mine is my misfortune. Mrs. Fortescue, you have taxed my hospitality and not found it wanting. But the experiment ends here, and forever."

"Oh, if you're going to get up and ramp like that," said Mrs. Fortescue, with an unpleasant laugh, "I've no further use for you. So, ta-ta, Sylvia; we'll try to take care of Bobby!"

Beckoning de Lorme to follow her, she had started to leave the place, when intercepted by Hallett, who approached his mistress with a note upon a salver.

"For Mrs. Fortescue, m'lady," he said, with an unmoved face. "Just arrived by special messenger from Foxbury."

"Give it to me!" exclaimed Mrs. Fortescue, returning hurriedly, and snatching up the envelope. "Foxbury! Where's that? The stuffy little village two miles from here? . . . Who can—?" Tearing open the note, she uttered a faint scream.

"Oh, this is beyond belief! Listen, everybody, to the way these people are insulting me:

"THE HEART OF OAK,
FOXBUKY."

"MADAME: It was my privilege to accompany your daughter and my nephew in their attempted elopement as far as this place, where, an unaccountable accident happening to my machine, we have put up for the night. Your daughter, after some conversation with me as to my nephew's finan-

cial status, has concluded to try matrimony in some other quarter than our family. My nephew has already gone on to town. Miss Fortescue thinks that perhaps you will wish to join her here, which I hope will be very soon, as I am sleeping on a sofa a foot too short for me, and the landlady is not what I call respectful.

"Yours obediently,
"LUCRETIA HILLYARD."

Sylvia's eyes brightened with suppressed laughter. Mrs. Fortescue looked like a thunder-cloud.

"So much for the manners and customs of Lady Sargent's world!" she exclaimed, furiously. "But I do not stop to discuss with you the doings of this mad-woman. I dare say, I can have a trap to take me to Foxbury——"

"Certainly, Mrs. Fortescue."

Hallett, who had wisely retired behind the shrubbery, now came forward again.

"I beg pardon, m'lady. There is also a telegram for Mrs. Fortescue."

He took a telegram from his pocket, and, laying it upon a salver, presented it ceremoniously.

"Why was I not given this at once?" cried the ireful Forty.

"I was afraid, ma'am, you would not feel able to stand so much."

"You afraid! Off with you!" she cried, scornfully, opening the second envelope with feverish fingers, and uttering a heartfelt cry.

"I knew it! Any other man would have had the decency to die at a better time!"

She rushed away, Hallett in her wake, Sylvia looking after them in astonishment.

"What is it?" she asked O'Rourke.

"Her husband, poor soul, is after goin' to his rest!" said the captain.

"Permit me, miladi," now observed de Lorme, who thought he saw his opportunity to cover, successfully, his own retreat, "to offer my congratulations upon your skill in ridding yourself of a very dangerous woman."

"Pardon me, Baron de Lorme, if I decline to accept them from one whom I choose to include no longer among my acquaintances," said Sylvia, looking him straight in the eyes.

"Miladi!" he said, reddening darkly.

"I thought, at least," she went on, "that people of your stripe and hers, stood together. I understand, upon good authority, that yours and Mrs. Fortescue's is a partnership, not in cards only, but in the promulgation of slanderous assertions about people whose bread and salt you eat. Perhaps you will feel like joining her, also, in the trap that will take her from my house!"

"Is it the custom of English gentlewomen to insult their guests?" he cried. But, seeing her back turned on him, he prudently contented himself with a quick departure from the scene.

"My turn next, Lady Sargent?" asked O'Rourke. "If I'm routed, I'll try to meet it like a soldier, and retreat with my colors flying."

"No, captain," she answered, smiling. "I think yours is simply a case of abnormal infatuation for bridge, and poor judgment in associates. Please try to forget how rude I've had to be in your hearing, and do me a little service."

"Bedad, I'd go barefoot to Land's End to please your ladyship!" he exclaimed.

"Not so far as that. Look for my husband, who's probably showing orchids to fat old Lady Stratharden, and tell him I——"

Sylvia, flushed with her triumphs, beamingly confident, had, involuntarily, turned her head at the sound of a rustle in the shrubbery beside her. A couple of dark forms were coming out of darker shadows into the brilliancy of the illuminations around a fountain close at hand. They were talking earnestly together, and did not see her, so that she had full time to note them carefully before they parted, the man to go on toward the house, the woman—whither, Sylvia neither knew nor cared.

In one moment, the mad, unreasoning jealousy of the day arose up within her, throbbing with renewed life. To conquer it, to cast it back into bondage was her first wish.

"No, you needn't look for my hus-

band," she said to O'Rourke, in a totally changed voice. "I forgot that he is otherwise engaged. But—I'm very tired, if you wouldn't mind leaving me here for a little while alone——"

"Faith, that's harder than fightin' your battles, my lady!" exclaimed the enthusiastic captain.

He left her, nevertheless, and Sylvia stood holding her rebellious heart, in shame at her speedy fall from grace.

Now were all the glories of her evening become like Dead Sea apples upon her palate! But amid these tumultuous thoughts arose the remembrance of her pledges to Vail and Hugh. She would be brave; she would trust, trust, forever trust, until from Hugh's own lips should come confirmation of her fears.

Thus Natalie, hastening in search of her scattered party for supper, found her rival, and in Sylvia's ingenuous face read what filled her with satisfaction.

"Sylvia, child!" she exclaimed, letting slip her domino from the glistening beauties of her costume, "why aren't you doing the honors to Lord Stratharden? Didn't I meet O'Rourke hurrying away from you? My dear, you *are* advanced! However, in your case every one makes allowances, don't you see?"

"I have seen more than that," said Sylvia, firmly.

"What! You were peeping at Hugh and me? Oh, that's too dreadfully *bourgeoise*. Doesn't it occur to you that it may be something of a relief for Hugh to get back among his own set again? What! still huffy? My dear child, your temper is execrable. You certainly need training in the outward seeming of good society."

"Perhaps so, for consider my models when in your house," said Sylvia, quietly.

"If you go on in this way, you will soon make yourself ridiculous. Just now, no doubt, Hugh, flattered by your heroics, laughs at you, and rallies you. By-and-bye, you will weary him, and, at the end of a few months, he'll be glad enough to get back to

reasonable beings. Perhaps, that time has already come."

"I think not," said Sylvia, calmly. "Hugh and I know each other perfectly."

"He knows you, perfectly, no doubt—but, do you know him?"

The insulting meaning she put into her query stung Sylvia to the quick.

"What do you mean?" the girl said, haughtily.

"Oh, nothing," answered Natalie, in the same tone.

"A nothing like that must mean everything to a wife."

"Let us talk about your costume!" exclaimed Natalie, airily. "Whoever made it for you, don't go to him again. And all those jewels, child! You might lead the procession in a Christmas pantomime!"

"They are the Sargent jewels. I am proud to wear them. Wouldn't you be if they were yours?" said Sylvia, innocently assuming the great lady.

"You know very well William is only a parvenu, and has no ancestral jewels to bestow," snapped Natalie.

"Hugh says the rubies are yet to come—a complete parure—necklace, tiara and all. Think of it!"

Natalie, who had a passion for jewels, could not endure this final touch.

"All this to bedeck the child of a pauper artist!" she said, sneeringly.

"All this to bedeck Lady Sargent, of Chelwood Park!" returned Sylvia, who, Natalie felt with rage, was certainly getting the better of their war of words.

"Well, my dear," Mrs. Hillyard resumed, with mild contempt, "there's no dealing with one so absurdly puffed up as you are. Every one's laughing at it behind your back, to-night. For Hugh's sake, try to keep it in. He shouldn't be made a laughing-stock, should he, just because he did rather the most heroic thing a man can do—sacrifice himself, to pull a woman out of the hole he'd got her into."

Sylvia looked her opponent full in the face. She had realized her danger

in their unequal conflict, had known that the poisoned dart would fall somewhere. Now, it had fallen.

"What you are hinting at, I do not ask to know—" she began; but Natalie cut her short.

"That's right. Be trustful. It's beautiful, and, under your circumstances, comforting. Now, I think I shall leave you to your reflections. I am sure those minuet people mistook my directions, and are waiting for me, indoors. You know our party at supper is to be quite unique—the table set with all-gold plate, pink roses, and the pink Dresden candelabra from Hugh's mother's cabinet. Hugh is the only outsider we shall allow to sit with us at table."

"I am sorry," said Sylvia, containing herself with an effort, "but you must give up your minuet supper-table."

"Why, pray?" asked Natalie, superbly.

"For one thing, because your party is broken up. Miss Fortescue and Bobby are absent, and I was obliged to ask Mrs. Fortescue and Baron de Lorme also to leave Chelwood."

"You—you presumed to insult my friends?"

"I requested those low and scurrilous persons to leave my house," Sylvia answered, steadily.

"Your house! *your* house!" cried Natalie, with blazing eyes. "Who put you here, I'd like to know?"

"Who, but my husband?" said Sylvia, simply.

"If you prefer to think so! Really, this pretense at ignorance is the merest affectation."

"I believe my husband. No slander of vile tongues shall come between us. Take care! For my guardian's sake, I'm doing my best to bear with you; but, after this, there can be no pretense of intercourse between us. When you leave Chelwood to-morrow, understand that I will never know you again—still less, under any circumstances, receive you here."

Natalie could not believe her ears. The girl she had snubbed and patron-

ized, rising upon her in such fearless contempt, and dismissing her the house like an offending lady's maid! She would dispense with hints, and give her her punishment in plain words, and speedily, at no matter what cost!

"You!" she said, "you! The beggar I set on horseback, the nobody Hugh took up and married, to save me from my husband's fearful jealousy! Surely, you remember the day at Ballyrig!"

"Have you no shame?" cried Sylvia.

Natalie shrugged her shoulders. "Since you force me to dot my i's!"

"It's not true, not true!"

"Think anything you choose, but, for heaven's sake, cultivate common-sense, and treat me, before others, with a show of civility. In this way, we may still manage to run along together, fairly well—really, the only way to manage these affairs."

"It's not true, not true!" repeated Sylvia, shuddering away from her.

"Still incredulous?" said Natalie, with a triumphant laugh. "Well, my dear, in that case, all you've got to do is to ask Hugh."

"I will ask him!" exclaimed Sylvia, stoutly.

"Sylvia, sweetheart! Sylvia!"

It was her husband calling. He had been seeking her everywhere, and by O'Rourke's direction now came hurrying toward the fountain. Never had the sound of her own name been so dear to her. Hugh was coming. He would defy Natalie, and put her wicked words to confusion.

"Hugh!" she cried out. He recognized in her voice a poignant appeal, and ran to her protection.

Full in his path stood Natalie, her dainty beauty unchanged by the evil thoughts and inspirations of her scheme to punish Sylvia. One glance at her, and one at Sylvia, was enough to reveal to him what had been passing between the two. Knowing Natalie as he did, he had always dreaded it.

"Hugh, tell her that she lies!" cried Sylvia, clinging to him, her whole anguished heart in her appeal.

"What has she said?" he answered, hoarsely.

"Ask Sir Hugh Sargent to deny," interposed Natalie, distinctly, "that when that jealous, furious old bore of mine surprised us in conversation about our own affairs in the woods at Ballyrig, to save myself I deliberately threw you upon his hands, forcing you to propose for her in marriage when you had not intended to, and thereby substantially composing my husband's mind, since he, like you, fell into the net at once!"

"Mrs. Hillyard—" began Sargent, desperately.

"Deny the facts as I have stated them," she said. "Ah! you can't. I thought so. Sylvia, won't that do?"

"Hugh, Hugh!" cried his wife, passionately. "What she's making you suffer is nothing to what I'm feeling. Only two words—a movement—and I'll believe you utterly. Never again shall she come between us, my husband! Never, I swear it, Hugh!"

There was a moment's silence. They could hear the band in the distance change to "*La Donna e Mobile*." The five Pierrots, scenting supper from afar, dashed up an alley, calling out: "Dance! dance! dance!" The three persons who stood near the illuminated fountain did not stir.

Then, despair gripped Sylvia's heart. She cared nothing for Natalie standing there with her mocking smile, and listening to her cry of the heart.

"Hugh!" she implored again, "I can't bear this awful silence! I haven't deserved it! It kills me! Speak! Think that my whole life's happiness hangs on your answer. It's false, isn't it? False! false! Answer me that, and all the rest of our married life shall be like one long, bright Summer's day, Hugh. I've had you such a little while, I can't lose you so soon. Don't let her take you from me. If she does, I shall want to die. Answer me! Say it's false!"

Hugh Sargent bowed his head.

"I cannot."

Both women heard him, though he spoke under his breath.

"I thought not!" said Natalie, in a pleasant and equable tone. "Good-bye, for the present, Hugh, and, for the sake of old times, bear me no malice."

She did not notice Sylvia, but fluttered off, airy and exquisite, taking the arm of a man she met going in to supper, and laughing with him, unconcernedly.

Sylvia, following her with bewildered eyes, dropped upon a bench, burying her hot face in her hands. Her husband, the first miserable moment at an end, went to her impulsively, and tried to take her in his arms; but she drew away from him with an unmistakable shudder; then, arising suddenly, she fled into the fragrant darkness of the night.

Kit Vail hastened to Hugh presently, asking, in cheery tones, what had become of their host, who was wanted to take Lady Stratharden down to supper.

"And Sylvia—where is she?" he added, a great change manifest in his voice when he caught sight of his friend's woe-stricken face.

"A moment ago, I lost her, Kit," said Hugh, "and it is just as if she had died."

V

ALMOST a year after the disastrous events of the fête at Chelwood—which, happily, did not become public gossip—a little group of three were variously engaged in the great hall of the manor-house, which frequently served the purposes of a family sitting-room.

Sylvia, who had lain low under suffering, and had forced herself to arise and come out again into everyday life, looked handsomer than of old, in her simple house-gown. She was engaged in making the toilette of her Chow puppy that whimpered a little under her vigorous brushing, but resigned himself to stand still in the grasp of Bobby Hillyard, who, in riding clothes, was at Sylvia's elbow. Away over by the window, where

from time to time she could look at the ever-deepening verdure of the Park, sat Auntie Loo, knitting a golf stocking.

Upon none of the three was change so manifest as in the truculent old lady, whose countenance wore a peacefulness of expression in harmony with her tranquil attitude and feminine occupation. Her very dress had lost its uncompromising masculinity of cut and texture. She looked years younger, and happy in spite of an anxious care that ever haunted the recesses of her sunny heart to see certain things righted in the lives of those now absorbing her daily thoughts.

"There, he's finished, the beautiful angel!" said Sylvia. "Thanks, Bobby, you may let him go. Now you shall be rewarded by getting a scamper down to the fish-pond, and a good bark at the swans."

"Who? I?" asked Bobby.

"Nonsense!" Sylvia answered, tapping him on the cheek with the handle of the Chow's hair-brush. Then she released the joyous and most human little beast, who fled in front of her to the door that Bobby opened for the pair.

"You'll tell her now?" asked Sylvia, in an undertone, as she was going out.

"Must I?" Bobby said, reluctant.

"You promised," said Sylvia, vanishing with a sigh which would not be smiled away.

Bobby came back with slow steps to where Miss Hillyard sat.

"And to think of me sitting without a creep in the room with a pet dog!" remarked auntie.

"Oh, you're a good sort, auntie. That isn't the only young animal you've allowed to impose on you!" said her nephew.

Auntie Loo answered him with begrudging gentleness. "Mustn't let you bore yourself to death, boy, down here in the country, seeing no one, going nowhere, leading this quiet life with two humdrum women."

"Nobody'd think of calling you humdrum, Auntie Loo. And as for Sylvia, she's the best, the pluckiest,

the most charming creature that ever drew breath!"

Miss Hillyard dropped her knitting, and looked at him.

"Robert, perhaps you'd better go back to town."

"Don't fear that for me, aunty," he said, laughing. "I'm safe—bomb-proof. But you can't think what Sylvia's been to me since my father's been so hard on me, keeping me back from where I long to be."

"Where poor Sir Hugh is," supplemented Miss Lucretia, sighing.

"Where all the best fellows I know are—down yonder, in South Africa."

"Ah, well! you're your father's only son, Bobby, and since that wretched woman ran away from him with a miserable, limp, little, weak-kneed object of a poet, who can't buy her a mutton-chop——"

"Yet, I'm told the Godfreys have got quite a decent little flat. Who supports 'em, Aunty Loo?"

"Don't know. Ravens, I suppose," said Miss Lucretia, gruffly.

"Don't call yourself names, old lady. I know your little tricks—trouble hasn't softened my governor. He's harder than ever to me. If it wasn't for you and Sylvia, and the hope that some day my father will remember an only son isn't an unusual apparition when the British army is at the front——"

"There, boy, don't talk of it. Maybe things will come around your way. If you've got bothers, look at Sylvia's. See how she bears 'em—how she's borne 'em all these months."

Bobby had picked up her knitting, and now made havoc of it in his nervousness.

"Aunty Loo," he said, clearing his throat, "I've got something to tell you. Sylvia's meditating what you and my friend Capper would call 'a bad break.'"

Miss Hillyard snatched at her knitting.

"Robert, don't be saucy. What do you mean?"

"Ever since she heard Sir Hugh has got safely over his illness, and has

been ordered home, she has been making up her mind to leave Chelwood."

"Leave Chelwood!—when I consented to give up my home and come here that she might continue to live under her own husband's roof?"

"But you don't know. She wants me to tell you. Some time ago, she engaged Vail to get her a divorce."

Miss Hillyard lost all her acquired suavity, and became the only original Aunty Loo.

"Divorce? Fiddlesticks! Vail? Ridiculous! Sylvia drag her affairs into court after all these months of behaving like a quiet Christian woman? I don't believe you, Bobby Hillyard. Divorce? Poppycock! And on what grounds, pray?"

"Between you and me and the lord chancellor," said Bobby, bowing before the blast, "Sylvia's greener than grass about the law. She wants to be free from Hugh, but knows no more than a babe unborn how to set about it. She trusts the whole blessed business to Vail, whom she's expecting any day to tell her how far it's got along."

"Did you say it's Sir Hugh's approaching return that's driving her to this foolery?" asked Miss Hillyard, fiercely.

"So it appears. I'll swear, the way Sargent's been raking in glory, I'd have thought Sylvia would be worshipping him in secret instead of planning to cut loose; but, with women, you can't tell!"

"And Kit Vail lends himself to this egregious, unspeakable folly?"

"I've told you all I know, aunty," Bobby replied, in a tone the more subdued because he fully agreed with her. "I told Sylvia I would, and I have. She said she didn't like to."

"Humph!" snorted the spinster, "no wonder she's ashamed. Preposterous! Why can't she wait till Sir Hugh comes home, and at least give him a chance to patch things up between 'em? Outrageous!"

"Thought you didn't approve of marriage, Aunty Loo?" ventured he, slyly.

"Don't answer back! I never could abide being answered back."

"I've my suspicions she thinks Sargent wants to be free as much as she does."

"Has he ever said so? Robert, this is a lesson to you. If ever a couple began by adoring each other, that one did. A little trust, a little patience—but no! Seems to me people nowadays rush into matrimony by one door, and out of it by another."

"The moral for the likes of us is to keep single, aunty."

"But Vail, Vail—the one sensible man of her acquaintance——"

"Thanks," said Bobby, smiling.

"You abet her, boy. That Kit Vail should deliberately lend himself to the monstrosity of getting her a divorce! He's disappointed me! And as to Sylvia— Robert," she added, rising with all her old abruptness, "I'm going to my room. If anybody asks for me, say I've taken a hot foot-bath, and am reading Jeremiah!" And, knitting in hand, Miss Hillyard majestically mounted the stairs, and went into afflicted seclusion.

"Good old Aunty Loo!" murmured Robert, with something like a cloud over his wide-awake, blue eyes.

Truly, the world seemed out of joint for him and everybody. As he crossed the hall to pick up his hat and crop, and go out for his ride, a servant passed him, hastening discreetly to open the front door. It was a new butler, *vice* the late Hallett, dismissed for sundry offenses directly after the night of the fancy ball.

"Mr. Vail is just arriving, sir," explained the man, "and, as my lady is still out, perhaps you'll receive him."

The door swung open to admit Kit Vail, whose bags and impedimenta the butler proceeded to gather in after him, disappearing with them up the stairs.

"Ha, Bobby! Glad you're stopping on," said Vail, in his customary friendly way.

Bobby, who secretly resented his coming on the proposed mission, tried to be dignified; but a few words passing

between them banished the effort. It was difficult to mistrust Kit Vail, no matter how appearances went against him.

"You've been a blessing to Sylvia, poor girl," said Kit.

"You see, I'm rather out of a job, just now," answered Bobby, who did not choose to touch on a sore subject. "It isn't money, as it used to be. My aunt, good soul, has set me up with more of an allowance than I deserve. But my governor's dead set on putting me in the bank, and I'm dead set on the army and active service."

"You don't want to eat fatted calf at home, when there are soldiers' rations and fighting at the front? I see. I was that way myself, before I settled down to consume veal, or bacon, or whatever I could get my clients to pay for. Cheer up, old man; it'll straighten out, I hope. Sylvia well?"

"Bloomin'," said Bobby, reacting under the other's genial influence. "But, I say, Vail, this is a devilish poor business she's brought you here about!"

"You are in her confidence?" asked Vail, with a non-committal smile.

"I'm next to her brother, don't you see? I wish I were her brother, and had some real authority."

"Authority doesn't count for much, when a woman is set on a step like this."

"I'll swear, what I've seen of marriage doesn't make me sicken for it. Sargent's a fellow any girl should be proud of. That wretched Natalie business—whatever it amounted to—was knocked out long ago. Now, why in the world——?"

"Ask Sylvia. Here she comes," said Vail.

Sylvia entered, running like a school-girl, and greeted Vail eagerly.

"How good of you, Kit! You knew how I hate being kept in suspense. I saw your fly turn in at the lodge-gate, and I called and whistled, but you wouldn't hear me. Had luncheon? Have tea, B-and-S, or anything? No? Then, shall we go into the library, or stay here?"

"Here, if you like Bobby."

"Oh, Bobby knows!" said she, naively. "He was the first whose advice I asked."

"Then, I am surprised you found it necessary to consult counsel," said Vail, mildly.

"Bobby doesn't exactly approve," she went on, nodding her head; "but he thinks I ought to do exactly what I think best."

"Bobby has in him the makings of a diplomat," observed Vail, drily.

"Oh, but Sylvia, I say!" interposed Bobby, growing red with suppressed emotion. "You know perfectly well I think you'll be sorry for this all your life. If I were a girl and had a man like Sargent coming back to me all used up by the war, and such a splendid name as he's won in service, do you think I'd turn my back on him? By Jingo, I wouldn't, then! That's all I've got to say about it, and I'm going for my ride."

"Even Bobby forsakes me," said Sylvia, dropping into melancholy as the front door closed on Hugh's advocate.

"Now, Sylvia," said Vail, in a brisk and businesslike tone, "let us lose no time in preamble. You are still resolved?"

"I am still resolved," she answered, dropping her eyes before him.

"Think again. You have borne your trial for a year—nobly and becomingly. You have lived here with Miss Hillyard, giving no one a chance to breathe a word to your discredit. In all these months, has the thought of Hugh had no softening influence? Hasn't his gallant and brilliant career in the army kindled your pride? Didn't the tears come unbidden to your eyes when you heard of his illness, and your heart bound with joy at his recovery? Above all, haven't you felt, convincingly, that not one man in fifty would have shown you such manly forbearance and generosity in all matters connected with your residence at Chelwood?"

"You know, Auntie Loo has just given me money enough to be independent. The first use I make of it is to spend no more of Sir Hugh's."

"Then, I wish the old lady had held on to her purse-strings."

"I shall probably return with her to America, where the dear old soul is longing to be."

"And pass the rest of your life in solitude?"

"I shall find some object," Sylvia answered, compressing her lips. "In forgetting self, I shall win happiness."

In her heart, she was thinking how dreadfully dreary this life she planned for herself would be. Her heart was echoing still to the appeal Vail had made to it.

"You are very young, Sylvia," Vail said, looking at her with something of wistfulness; "and your life, please God, may be a long one."

"I hope so," she said, with her vivid smile. "I love living, Kit."

"You will be lonely after such intimate companionship as you have had——"

"Don't I know it? Haven't I felt—? There, Kit, let me only say that I can't and won't stay here. It was possible, so long as Hugh kept away. Now that he's coming home, how could we live under the same roof, and be merely speaking acquaintances? It would be too hard for both of us. Therefore, I have decided that the only remedy for this embarrassment is to be legally separated, to give him a new chance, and, once and forever, set my own mind at rest."

"You are obstinate, Sylvia, under that mask of soft femininity. I have seen it in you before. Very well, then; this much is decided. Would you mind repeating to me the reasons for your rupture with your husband?"

"You *can't* have forgotten them?" she cried.

"In my legal capacity," Vail said, taking out a note-book and pencil, and looking at her in an inscrutable sort of fashion. "By the way, I believe you told me you have no knowledge whatever of the laws of divorce in England?"

"Of course not. How could I?" she said, girlishly.

"And you have placed your suit in

my hands, to be dealt with according to my best judgment and conscience?"

"Certainly."

"Please recapitulate your ideas of the causes why you and Hugh should be no longer man and wife."

"I told you," she said, with a deep, deep sigh, "about that dreadful scene with Natalie, and afterward with him, the night before he went away. Oh, Kit!"

"Courage, Sylvia. Go on!"

"No; I can't. You know it all—every bit. And you know he left Chelwood without seeing me after I left him in the garden, and that I have never seen him since."

"I believe that, if you had both had patience—particularly you—the affair would have blown over long ere this."

"Patience—when he did not deny, when he has never since denied? Oh, Kit, let us have no more of it! I cannot live over again the suffering of this year. I have myself in check now, and I mean to keep so. Set me free from Hugh—the sooner the better, for both of us."

Vail pondered for a moment before he spoke.

"Sylvia, if there were a child you loved lying ill, and she would not take any remedies proposed, and you felt sure, entirely sure you could cure her by a method—extreme, perhaps—wouldn't you——?"

There was an interruption in the person of Gibson, the butler, who came into the hall with a genteel expression of countenance.

"Beg pardon, m'lady; there's a person outside who says he has a piece of property of your ladyship's which he desires to put into your ladyship's own hands."

"What sort of a person, Gibson?" asked my lady, annoyed.

"Beg, pardon, m'lady, I am informed by the other servants that he was my predecessor in office—Hallett, by name. But I must ask you to excuse his dilapidated appearance."

"Hallett! the tool of those women!" said Sylvia, apart to Vail, a flood of red

streaming into her cheeks. "I thought we were done with him, and the like of him. What can he presume to want of me?"

"While I am here, it will do no harm to see."

"You may show Hallett in, Gibson," said Lady Sargent; and, when the man had gone, she resumed her speculations. A piece of property, some ornament lost and forgotten? Strange he should wish to return it.

"Very strange, if it's of any value," said Vail.

Gibson came back at once, followed by Hallett in shabby clothes, wearing a depressed expression, and keeping his eyes cast down.

"Hallett, m'lady," said Gibson, retiring with the expression of one who has known no sin.

"Good morning, m'lady. Good morning, Mr. Vail, sir," said a feeble echo of Hallett's once pompous voice. "I have took this liberty, impelled by the voice of conscience."

"A voice to which you had better have listened," said Vail, Lady Sargent giving no recognition of the man's presence, "before you were arrested for blackmail against your most recent employer, and sentenced to six months at hard labor."

"Oh, Mr. Vail, you are aware of the circumstances? Then, I need not enlarge on them, further than to say that I am but just emerged from my—er—enforced retirement."

"So I should have supposed. And you have stopped somewhere, by the way, to console yourself for long abstinence from the bottle. Come, man, be quick. What have you to say to her ladyship?"

"Her ladyship will, perhaps, remember the evening of the fête nearly a year ago—beautiful scene, sir, a dream of fairy-land; often has it arisen to cheer me in my hours of gloom."

"Never mind your hours of gloom," said Vail, sharply.

"Ah, sir, I have been an author, and my imagination naturally soars! That evening, Mr. Vail, just before it was time for me to announce the

supper, Sir Hugh came to me, looking vexed like, and asked me to hunt up m'lady, and give her a note he had scribbled on one of his cards."

Sylvia, interposing, spoke imperiously.

"Why did you not obey him?"

"My lady, with shame, I acknowledge that I was—to use a legal phrase, Mr. Vail—retained—by a—er—fellow-contributor whom I will not name, to give her every scrap of information concerning the private affairs of Sir Hugh and her ladyship."

"And you dare—!" cried Sylvia. "Go! Don't darken my doors again!"

"One moment, Lady Sargent," said Vail. "What became of that card, Hallett?"

Hallett took out, with deliberation, a greasy pocket-book.

"I 'ave it here, sir. The opportunity never arising to deliver it, I kept it as a memento of happier days."

"You mean you kept it, hoping somehow or other to see your way to selling it? That's what you've come here now for, isn't it?"

Hallett coughed, deprecatingly.

"Oh, Mr. Vail!"

Vail took out his own pocket-book.

"Very well. To start you on your way in the new life which I trust is awaiting you, we'll give you five pounds—not a penny more—when I am assured the note is genuine."

"Give it to me," said Sylvia; and the card was passed into her hand. With a glance, she satisfied herself of its contents.

"Well?" said Vail.

"It is genuine," she answered, walking away to look out of the window.

"There, my man, a larger sum than you deserve," said Vail, bestowing the money on Hallett. "And now, be off with you, and let us never hear of you again."

"Yes, Mr. Vail," responded Hallett, sweetly. "Oh, when I look around these halls that I nevermore may tread, how forcibly am I reminded of the poet's words:

"'A sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things.'"

"Get out!" said Vail, impatiently.

"Yes, Mr. Vail. Good day, sir. Good day, m'lady."

On the threshold of the door by which he had been wont to come and go in his pride of power, the man stopped, and delivered a parting sentiment:

"I should like to say, in my own defense, that my downfall dates from my *début* as a society author!"

"Get out!" reiterated Vail.

"Well, Sylvia?" Kit said, joining her at the window-seat, and trying not to notice the tears that dimmed her eyes.

"Kit, if I had had this, it would have explained what just set me on fire with jealousy that fatal night. Hugh tells me there is a row on between Natalie's electricians, and he has to go with her to settle it. They had begun by cutting off the lights in the cedar walk, and were threatening to do so with the rest."

"Nothing more?"

"Only to ask me to keep back supper, till he could get there to take in Lady Stratharden."

She stood mournfully looking at the card.

"Doesn't that show you how easily things may be explained? Isn't there a chance that the other—the supreme cause of offense—might be also——?"

"Kit, why in God's name, didn't he say so? I'm going to talk to you as my friend, first, and afterward as my lawyer. In my first hot burst of indignation at finding that I had been tricked into marriage by Hugh and Natalie, I shut myself in my room alone. The great blow was that Hugh didn't even try to come there. He just went away from me—almost a year ago! If he loved me, why didn't he come to me? Why didn't he come to me?"

"What use would his denials have been? Sylvia, surely you believe Hugh loved you when he married you?"

"I thought so—before darkness fell."

"If he has suffered as you have,

shouldn't that bring you together now?"

"Could he have felt as I did?"

"I believe he went out to South Africa a broken-hearted, hopeless man, taking his life in his hand, and now, on the whole, rather disappointed than otherwise that he hasn't succeeded in parting with it."

"While I, to keep up appearances," cried she, passionately, "have stayed on here, hiding my misery and being forgotten by the world! I've let everybody but you and Aunt Loo and Bobby think I'm duly and properly waiting for my husband to return and take up his old place in the county and in affairs. I've gone and come with a hard little lump here where a heart should be. Now, don't try to soften me. Let me keep my hard little lump—it's better than a heart alive and quivering, longing and yearning. It'll help me to leave Chelwood that I've grown to love so dearly."

"I have done with remonstrance," said Vail, after a pause. "I mean to act according to my discretion."

"According to your discretion!" she repeated.

"And now, to business! Be so kind as to convey to me, in brief, your conception of the methods you expect to pursue in prosecuting your suit for divorce against Sargent."

Sylvia answered with animation.

"I have thought it all over, again and again. Of course, I don't *know* exactly *how*, Kit!"

"I am aware of that," Vail answered, drily.

"My idea was that, as you mightn't like to do it—plead it, argue it, whatever you call the thing—being my cousin and Hugh's friend, you might engage for me some nice, refined, considerate lawyer and a fatherly sort of judge."

"And after that?" said Vail, with difficulty suppressing his smile.

"Then, I supposed that you—" began Sylvia.

"—or the nice, refined, considerate lawyer—" interrupted Vail.

"—would draw up the papers in the case," went on Sylvia, glibly.

"Next?"

"Of course, as I said," resumed she, "I don't know the exact preliminaries. I only know that I want the thing managed so that nobody outside can have the smallest idea of what is going on."

"But your allegations against Hugh?"

"My what?" she asked, puzzled.

"Oh, yes, I understand. Certainly, I want that to be stated, but with restraint. I don't want to make it too strong, you know. No need of telling all—just enough to show it is impossible for Hugh and me ever to live together again."

"The law, unfortunately, makes no bones of people's feelings. It must know all—the whole, absolute truth of what led to your rupture with your husband, and what will keep you apart from him in future."

Sylvia hung her lovely head, and blushed.

"Then, if you must, Kit, tell it—but only to the judge."

"Had you expected to appear in court, to give your own testimony against Hugh?" asked Vail, after withdrawing to gaze at one of Hugh's ancestors upon the wall.

"Oh, dear, *no*!" exclaimed she, much frightened. "Wouldn't go there for the world!"

"Suppose this, too, becomes necessary?"

"Oh, but I couldn't, Kit. Really, I couldn't. I'd be *limp* with fear. You'd have to explain it to the judge. I'm sure he would let me off."

"Some women have no such reticence."

"Oh, I know. I used to hear Natalie's friends talk of going to a divorce trial as if it were a *matinée* at the opera."

"Have you ever thought what it would be to hear your letters and Hugh's read aloud before a callous, curious audience; to have every incident of your intimate life together dragged out by the roots, and dis-

played for the amusement of the public; to have these details and the discussion of them hawked next day over all the land by the newsboys; to know that wherever you go, henceforth, you will be blazoned as the heroine of a scandal? For that's what a young woman gets, when she goes into seeking a divorce!"

"Horrible, Kit!" she said, shivering. "It makes me ill. But, of course, in my case, there'll be nothing of *that* kind! Not when you have the management of it—oh, no!"

Vail walked to and fro for a few moments, while she stood ruefully contemplating the picture he had drawn.

Finally, he came back to her. "Sylvia, I have a surprise for you. Hugh is in England!"

He never forgot the illumination of her face at that instant.

"Hugh! Hugh!" she cried, her voice thrilling. "Where is he? When will he—? Oh, I forgot!"

The illumination was extinguished as if a shade had been suddenly drawn down.

"He landed last night at Southampton. I had a letter there waiting for him, and received in return for it a wire, stating that he will reach Chelwood this afternoon."

"Is he well, quite well—not overtired by his voyage—the old wound quite healed?"

She could not keep that tell-tale thrill from her broken sentences. Vail did not trust himself to look at her.

"Quite well, it seems," he said, without emotion.

"I must hurry and tell them to have Hugh's rooms ready!" cried she, plunging into a tremor of nervous excitement. "I wonder if there's anything he ought to have to eat. Hugh can't endure beef-tea—says it might as well be baby food. Won't Bobby and Auntie Loo be astonished! How the servants and tenants will rejoice!"

"Don't trouble yourself, Sylvia," said Vail, arresting her flight. "Hugh will come here for only a short visit,

without announcing himself beforehand, keeping his fly waiting at the door."

"His fly—waiting? at this door?" gasped she.

"As soon as he hears what you and I have decided about this matter of the divorce, he will go back to town. A gentleman could do no less."

"Oh, of course!" said Sylvia, dejectedly dropping into a chair.

"And now, Sylvia, for the last of my surprises," said her cousin, watching her narrowly. "It was in order to make sure that you thoroughly understood your position in the matter of this divorce——"

"I do, *thoroughly*. You must see that."

"—that I asked you to recapitulate the instructions previously received from you—under these circumstances——"

"Yes, under the circumstances. Go on; why do you hesitate?"

"I have felt justified—I feel justified—in adopting a course of procedure I should not, perhaps, employ with another."

"How good of you, Kit!" she cried, fervently. "Go on!"

"Anxious above all things to meet your wishes at the earliest moment and in the most thorough manner possible, I have had this case conducted on the lines laid down by you."

There was a longish pause.

"Do hurry, Kit!" she said, rather pettishly.

"Owing to peculiar facilities possessed by me," he resumed, rapidly, "I was able to have the case pushed up the list of causes with quite surprising rapidity—er—er—er—it was finally set down to be heard to-day."

"*To-day!*" cried Sylvia, horrified.

"I shall spare you the tedious and, perhaps, incomprehensible particulars—" he went on, addressing himself, apparently, to an oak-tree seen through the window.

"But *to-day*, Kit!" interrupted she, reproachfully; "wasn't that dreadfully soon?"

"The law, my dear Lady Sargent,"

he answered, oracularly, "moves when and where it wills."

"I suppose so," said Sylvia, wiping her eyes.

Vail gathered all his courage. "I had started for the train—had reached Paddington—was, in fact, engaged in a discussion with my cabby because I had given him the exact legal fare. With sublime hauteur, he drew himself up upon his perch, money in hand, and remarked, witheringly: '*Might I harsk 'ow long you 'ave bin a-savin' up for this 'ere little treat?*'"

"Tell me the story another time," said she, without the ghost of a smile. "I'm anxious to get on."

"So was I," said Kit, warming to his task. "Looking around, I saw myself pursued by a clerk from my chambers, in a cab. He put a note into my hand. It was from the solicitor—the 'nice, refined lawyer' to whom I had entrusted the management of your exceedingly delicate affair——"

"I don't think I like his mixing up in it," said Sylvia, her lip curling.

"Neither did I. But the result justifies my confidence. By one of those curious accidents of our profession, your case had been shoved up to the very top of the list."

"Don't say shoved!" interpolated Sylvia. "It doesn't sound—respectful."

"I beg your pardon. Prepare for the greatest surprise of all. The case was heard to-day, and was decided in your favor!"

Sylvia uttered a cry. "Then—I am——?"

"What do you most desire to be?" he said, evasively. "No longer Sargent's wife?"

"Oh!" said Sylvia, blankly.

"You don't seem pleased," said Vail.

"It is, of course, a shock—being divorced," she faltered.

To Vail's relief, a diversion here occurred—no less a one than the frantic entrance of Bobby Hillyard by the front door, waving his cap, and apparently hoarse from much shouting.

"Hurray, Sylvia and Vail!" he cried. "Hugh's coming! He's nearly here!

I met his fly at the cross-roads, and the tenants had somehow got wind of his return, and were there to welcome him. They're bringing him home in triumph! Jove, but it's rippin' to talk with a man from the front! Hurray! hurray!"

In the general excitement that ensued, only Vail noticed Sylvia's face growing more pale and wan. The house servants came into the halls, as shouts were heard drawing nearer on the outside. Bobby danced a fandango of joy all by himself, and Miss Lucretia, in short gown and petticoat, ran to look over the banisters, above.

"Whatever's the matter? Is the house on fire?" called Auntie Loo.

"Hugh's coming, aunty!" answered Bobby. "Run down, and welcome Colonel Sir Hugh Sargent, of the Second Blankshire Volunteers! Welcome to the master of Chelwood! Hurray! hurray!" And, seizing a flag from the wall, he ran to wave it from the door. Miss Lucretia, scarcely less moved, ran out and stood behind him. The shouting came nearer.

"Kit, Kit, I can't meet him! Take me away!" said Sylvia, in Vail's ear.

He looked at her for a moment, with a strange expression in his eyes, a blending of pity and uncertainty. Then, as the two great doors were thrown wide open by his servants, and Sir Hugh, pale and feeble, appeared on the threshold, followed by a troop of his tenants and beneficiaries, Sylvia urged Vail again to take her from the hall.

Hugh, looking at her eagerly, yearningly, saw only that she avoided him, and clung to Vail; and, as the two disappeared within the library, the master of Chelwood felt black wrath enter into, and possess, his soul.

He hardly knew how he endured the greetings of the others, the speeches and congratulations of the older and more dignified of his tenants, who, having ranged themselves in order, in the great hall, had each to be listened to with patience, and replied to with courtesy.

Miss Hillyard and Bobby, as soon as the place was again clear of outsiders, felt that there would be scant satis-

faction in an interview with Hugh, until after he had seen Sylvia.

The old lady, especially, who cherished a secret hope that on Hugh's return things would adjust themselves between himself and Sylvia in the natural, old-fashioned way, was in the greatest hurry to bring them together speedily. She coaxed Bobby away up-stairs, and sincerely wished that she could do the same by Vail.

When, at last, he stood alone, Hugh cast one glance around him at the dear, familiar spot, and sank, physically exhausted, into a chair.

At the same moment, the door of the library opened, and Vail hastened toward him with outstretched hand.

"Hugh! dear old boy! How I've longed for this I can't begin to tell you!"

There was no answering light in Sargent's eye, and his hand was not extended in return.

"Agreeably to your instructions," he said, coldly, "I come to Chelwood for the interview with my wife, which you thought desirable. Arriving, unexpectedly, I have seen you in your attitude of consoler—that is enough. I neither wish to see Sylvia, nor to talk to you."

"Give me a hearing, Hugh," pleaded Vail, good-humoredly; but he was checked by a burst of passion.

"To the devil with your explanations!" Sargent cried. "To you, I saw her look for consolation, in the shock of my unwelcome return! You are her refuge! She is weaned from me. You are her supporter. Once, I told you to win her if you could; but I did not mean you to win away from me my wife, whom I'd trusted to you, while I was leading a dog's life, and you had all the chance. Damn you, Kit Vail, I'll kill you, if you have!"

Sylvia ran out, impetuously. The ring of her husband's voice had reached her in the library. Too well, she saw that Vail's intermediation had proved a failure. But she would not let Hugh insult them both, like that.

"Hugh," she said, breathlessly, "what you are saying is a shame to

yourself and me. Isn't it enough that you've robbed me of happiness, that you try to put this foul blot on the best friendship of my life? Kit, please don't answer—*please*. Just go into the library, till after I have spoken with Sir Hugh. Kit, I entreat you—I insist!"

Sargent, whom the exertion of his outburst had considerably weakened, lay back wearily in his chair. He felt, rather than saw, Vail withdraw at Sylvia's bidding, and spoke to her in broken sentences:

"If—I've wronged you—or Vail—I can only beg your pardon; but you must own it was a cruel home-coming. I'm a bit weak—not long off the sick-list——"

Sylvia, who had seen him only in full health, was inexpressibly distressed when, at this point, his head fell back upon the cushions of the chair—their chair, she had always thought it—and his face grew deathly pale.

In an instant, she was at his side, clasping his dear head in her arms, pleading to him to speak to his own Sylvia, and to forgive her what had passed.

As Hugh revived, he said, dreamily: "Sylvia! This is heaven!" To which, obtaining no verbal answer, he went on to murmur,

"—after long grief and pain
To feel the arms of my true love
Around me once again!"

And Sylvia, in return, clung to him, and whispered in his ear words of infinite tenderness. Poor Vail was forgotten, with all the world beside, while the lovers exchanged their joys of reunion.

Suddenly, a lightning-like thought pierced Sylvia's consciousness.

She drew away from Hugh, left a kiss unknissed, a fond word unspoken. Silent and wretched, she stole farther and farther off.

"Come back, darling. Why on earth are you leaving me? I want you to say again, 'Hugh, my own husband.'"

"I have no right!" she said, plaintively.

"Come back!" he repeated. "Ridiculous as it seems, I'm actually too shaky to come to you."

"It's dreadful, but I can't," breathed Sylvia, woebegone.

"What can you mean?"

"When you are stronger, I'll explain."

"You find you don't love me well enough?" he cried, bitterly.

"You know I *have* loved you, with all the power and passion of my youth, with the love that comes but once," she answered.

"And from the moment the precious boon came to me," he answered, solemnly, "that love was returned in fullest measure. A terrible misfortune came between us; you misjudged me, and I could not set you right. But, oh, Sylvia, wife, even if I had been what you believed me, haven't I expiated my offense?"

"Don't! don't!" she said, in trembling tones. "You make my heart ache. All you are saying of yourself, Kit has said of you, over and again, to me. He is the truest, most loyal of your friends. But, alas! I was stubborn in my belief. Nothing moved me. I thought you and I could be happy only apart from each other, and so—oh, Hugh! Hugh!"

She broke down in a flood of weeping.

"Sylvia, finish what you began to say," said her husband, sternly.

"I did—something—that has parted us forever," she answered, with a wretched face.

"What?" shouted Hugh.

"I must leave you. There is now no excuse for me to stay."

"Excuse?" he repeated.

"It would be—improper," she said, blushing.

"Improper?" shouted Sargent, louder than before.

"I can't answer anything, Hugh, if you shout at me like that! I will leave you, and go up to my room. And, oh, Hugh, when I am far away—"

"Where, may I ask, are you going?" he interrupted, sardonically.

"Probably to America," she said, trying to wipe her eyes.

"I'll come, too," he exclaimed, his face brightening; "we'll shake Auntie Loo, and go on a little bat all by ourselves!"

"Hugh, don't jest. We *can't*," she said, desperately. "Circumstances, of which you evidently know nothing, have arisen like a wall between us. But I can't tell you, I can't! Kit must. I'll fetch Kit."

As she ran into the library, returning with her cousin, Sargent said, within himself:

"I'll be hanged if I hear anything from Kit!"

Sylvia, having arraigned Kit before their common judge, appealed to him.

"Kit, Hugh must be made to understand that I am—that we are—no longer married."

"No longer married? What rubbish!" said Sargent.

"Tell him—tell him!" urged Sylvia.

"Yes, I'll tell you, dear old boy," began Vail, looking from one to the other with beaming eyes, "that, seeing your poor, self-willed little wife bent upon the destruction of her and your married happiness—and in despair of effecting a cure by any other means—I have, in order to bring Sylvia to her senses—like the 'nice, refined lawyer' that I am, Sylvia—told her an awful, absurd, impossible whopper—"

Sylvia, starting joyfully, cut him short. "Oh, Kit! then I'm not—?"

"Not in the least," he said, smiling.

Sylvia drew closer to Sargent. "I'm still—?"

"Just as much as ever you were. In fact, to judge from appearances, rather more so—if you mean Hugh's devoted wife!"

Sylvia's scream of delight brought Auntie Loo and Bobby back into the hall, and made Vail's eyes fill with some very babyish tears. Directly, her arms were again around her husband's neck, and she was crying out:

"Oh, Hugh, Hugh! I thought I was divorced. Thank God, you're mine still, and nothing on earth can part us!"

"Don't cry, Sylvia; don't cry, dear!"

said Hugh. "What all this nonsense of yours and Kit's means, I won't stop to ask, now. You are already too much upset. *Please* wipe your eyes."

"I can't," said Sylvia, feeling everywhere for her, as usual, absent handkerchief. Then, struck with a happy thought, she put her hand into Hugh's breast-pocket and possessed herself of his, using and returning it with the fervent comment:

"You would never believe how I've missed that handkerchief!"

Tears of joy dry fast, and Sylvia's face was presently again wreathed in the smiles long absent from it—smiles

that warmed Aunty Loo's old heart to look upon. Neither she nor Bobby ever knew more than the fact of the reconciliation.

Bobby was made glad by Sargent's information that he had met his father at a club in town, and been told that Bobby was soon to have a commission in the Second Blankshires.

Kit Vail, alone, going back to town by an evening train, failed to realize how he had profited by the situation. He felt himself to have played a most unthankful part in the affair.

"But, as long as Sylvia has her husband, what's the odds?" he concluded, lighting a fresh cigar.



WHERE DID LOVE GO?

WHERE did Love go? I only know that he
Unbound his wings, and boasted he was free,
And scorned my faith, and laughed to see my tears—
Though once he swore to serve me through the years,
And vowed he had no thought apart from me.

Should he return, his face I would not see,
And neither ask nor take his sympathy;
I question night and day, but no one hears,
Where did Love go?

Fool that I was, to harken to his plea,
Who showed me joy to make it mockery!
Was it another voice sang in his ears,
Traitor, the while he kissed away my fears?
Ah, Love, come back, and bid me pardon thee!
Where did Love go?

CHARLOTTE BECKER.



VERY LIKELY

"PROUDLEY is very haughty because of his descent."
"Because it's such a great one?"

ON MIDSUMMER NIGHT

By Madison Cawein

ALL the poppies in their beds,
Nodding crumpled crimson heads;
And the larkspurs, in whose ears
Twilight hangs, like twinkling tears,
Sleepy jewels of the rain;
All the violets, that strain
Eyes of amethystine gleam;
And the clover-blooms that dream
With their baby fists closed tight—
They can hear upon this night,
Noiseless as the moon's soft light,
Footsteps and the glimmering flight,
Shimmering flight,
Of the Fairies.

II

Every sturdy four-o'clock,
In its variegated frock;
Every slender sweet-pea, too,
In its hood of pearly hue;
Every primrose pale that dozes
By the wall, and slow uncloses
A sweet mouth of dewy dawn
In a little silken yawn—
On this night of silvery sheen,
They can see the Fairy Queen,
On her palfrey white, I ween,
Tread dim cirques of haunted green,
Moonlit green,
With her Fairies.

III

Never a foxglove bell, you see,
That's a cradle for a bee;
Never a lily, that's a house
Where the butterfly may drowse;
Never a rose-bud or a blossom,
That unfolds its honeyed bosom
To the moth, that nestles deep,
And there sucks itself to sleep—

THE SMART SET

But can hear and also see,
 On this night of witchery,
 All that world of Faërie,
 All that world where airily,
 Merrily,
 Dance the Fairies.

IV

It was last Midsummer Night,
 In the moon's uncertain light,
 That I stood among the flowers,
 And, in language unlike ours,
 Heard them speaking of the Pixies,
 Trolls and Gnomes and Water-Nixies;
 How in this flow'r's ear a Fay
 Hung a gem of rainy ray;
 And round that flow'r's throat had set,
 Dim, a dewdrop carcanet;
 Then among the mignonette
 Stretched a cobweb-hammock wet,
 Dewy wet,
 For the Fairies.

V

Long I watched, but never a one,
 Ariel, Puck or Oberon,
 Mab or Queen Titania—
 Fairest of them all they say—
 Clad in morning-glory hues,
 Did I glimpse among the dews.
 Only once I thought the torch
 Of that elfin-rogue and arch,
 Robin Goodfellow, afar
 Flashed along a woodland bar—
 Like a jack-o'-lantern star,
 Or a lamp of firefly spar,
 Glow-worm spar,
 Tossed by Fairies.



IN CHICAGO

MISS SMYTHE—Oh, I had such a lovely time yesterday! I went to Celia's
 silver wedding, and——

MISS TOMKYNs—Why, she hasn't been married anything like twenty-five
 years!

MISS SMYTHE—No, dear, twenty-five times.

THE BELL IN THE FOG

By Gertrude Atherton

THE great author had realized one of the dreams of his ambitious youth, the possession of an ancestral hall in England. It was not so much the good American's reverence for ancestors that inspired his longing to have his being in stately decorum among the ghosts of an ancient line, as artistic appreciation of the mellowness, the dignity, the aristocratic aloofness of walls that have sheltered, and furniture that has embraced, generations and generations of the dead. To mere wealth, only his astute and incomparably modern brain yielded respect; his ego raised its goose-flesh at the sight of rooms furnished with a single cheque, exceptional as the taste might be. The dumping of the old interiors of Europe into the glistening shells of the United States not only roused him almost to passionate protest, but offended his patriotism—which he classified among his unworked ideals. The average American was not an artist, therefore he had no excuse for even the affectation of cosmopolitanism. Heaven knew he was national enough in everything else, from his accent to his lack of repose; let his surroundings be in keeping.

Orth had left the United States soon after his first successes, and, his art being too great to be confounded with locality, he had long since ceased to be spoken of as an American author. All civilized Europe, indeed, furnished stages for his puppets, and if never picturesque nor impassioned, his originality was as overwhelming as his style. His subtleties might not always be understood—indeed, as a rule, they were not—but the musical mystery of his

language and the penetrating charm of his lofty and cultivated mind, induced raptures in the initiated, forever denied to those who failed to appreciate him.

His following was not a large one, but it was very distinguished. The aristocracies of the earth gave to it; and not to understand and admire Ralph Orth was deliberately to relegate one's self to the ranks. But the elect are few, and they frequently subscribe to the circulating libraries; on the Continent, they buy the Tauchnitz edition; and had not Mr. Orth inherited a sufficiency of ancestral dollars to enable him to keep rooms in Jermyn street, and the wardrobe of an Englishman of leisure, he might have been forced to consider the tastes of the middle-class at a desk in Hampstead. But, as it mercifully was, the fashionable and exclusive sets of London knew and sought him. He was too wary to become a fad, and too sophisticated to grate or bore; consequently, his popularity continued evenly from year to year, and long since he had come to be regarded "as one of them." He was not keenly addicted to sport, but he could handle a gun, and all men respected his dignity and breeding. They cared less for his books than women did, perhaps because patience is not a characteristic of their sex. I am alluding, however, in this instance to men-of-the-world. A group of young literary men—and one or two women—put him on a pedestal and kissed the earth before it. Naturally, they imitated him, and as this flattered him, and he had a kindly heart deep among the cere-cloths of his formalities, he sooner or later wrote

"appreciations" of them all, which nobody living could understand, but, owing to the sub-title and signature, they answered every purpose.

With all this, however, he was not utterly content. From the twelfth of August until late in the Winter—when he did not go to Homburg and the Riviera—he visited the best houses in England, slept in state chambers, and meditated in historic parks; but the country was his one passion, and he longed for his own acres.

He was turning fifty when his great-aunt died and made him her heir: "as a poor reward for his immortal services to literature," read the will of this phenomenally appreciative relative. The estate was a large one. There was a rush for his books which ran each into three new editions. He smiled with cynicism, not unmixed with sadness; but he was very grateful for the money, and, as soon as his fastidious taste would permit, he bought him a country-seat.

The place gratified all his ideals and dreams—for he had romanced about his sometime English possessions as he had never dreamed of woman. It had once been the property of the church, and the ruin of cloister and chapel above the ancient wood was sharp against the low pale sky. Even the house itself was Tudor, but wealth from generation to generation had kept it in repair; and the lawns were as velvety, the hedges as rigid, the trees as aged as any in his own works. It was not a castle nor a great property, but it was quite perfect; and for a long while he felt like a bridegroom on a succession of honeymoons. He often laid his hand against the rough ivied walls in a lingering caress.

After a time, he returned the hospitalities of his friends, and his invitations, given with the exclusiveness of his great distinction, were never refused. Americans visiting England eagerly sought for letters to him; and if they were sometimes benumbed by that cold and formal presence, and awed by the silences of Chillingsworth—the few who entered there—they thrilled at

the verbal prospect of the memory, and forthwith bought an entire set of his books. It was characteristic that they dared not ask him for his autograph.

Although women invariably described him as "brilliant," a few men affirmed that he was gentle and lovable, and any one of them was well content to spend weeks at Chillingsworth with no other companion. But, on the whole, he was rather a lonely man.

It occurred to him how lonely he was, one gay June morning when the sunlight was streaming through his narrow windows, illuminating tapestries and armor, the family portraits of the young profligate from whom he had made this splendid purchase, dusting its gold on the black wood of wainscot and floor. He was in the gallery at the moment, studying one of his two favorite portraits, a gallant little lad in the green costume of Robin Hood. The boy's expression was imperious and radiant, and he had that perfect beauty which in any disposition appealed so powerfully to the author. But as Orth stared to-day at the brilliant youth, of whose life he knew nothing, he suddenly became aware of a human stirring at the foundations of his esthetic pleasure.

"I wish he were alive and here," he thought, with a sigh. "What a jolly little companion he would be! And this fine old mansion would make a far more complimentary setting for him than for me."

He turned away, abruptly, only to find himself face to face with the portrait of a little girl who was quite unlike the boy, yet so perfect in her own way, and so unmistakably painted by the same hand, that he had long since concluded they had been brother and sister. She was angelically fair, and, young as she was—she could not have been more than six years old—her dark-blue eyes had a beauty of mind which must have been remarkable twenty years later. Her pouting mouth was like a little scarlet serpent, her skin almost transparent, her pale hair fell

waving—not curled with the orthodoxy of childhood—about her tender bare shoulders. She wore a long white frock, and clasped tightly against her breast a doll far more gorgeously arrayed than herself. Behind her were the ruins and the woods of Chillingworth.

Orth had studied this portrait many times, for the sake of an art which he understood almost as well as his own; but to-day he saw only the lovely child. He forgot even the boy in the intensity of this new and personal absorption.

"Did she live to grow up, I wonder?" he thought. "She should have made a remarkable, even a famous woman, with those eyes and that brow, but—could the spirit within that ethereal frame stand the enlightenments of maturity? Would not that mind—purged, perhaps, in a long probation, from the dross of other existences—flee in disgust from the commonplace problems of woman's existence? Such perfect beings should die while they are still perfect. Still, it is possible that this little girl, whoever she was, was idealized by the artist, who painted into her his own dream of exquisite childhood."

Again he turned away impatiently. "I believe I am rather fond of children," he admitted. "I catch myself watching them on the street when they are pretty enough. Well, who does not like them?" he added, with some defiance.

He went back to his work; he was chiseling a story which was to be the foremost excuse of a magazine as yet unborn. At the end of half an hour he threw down his wondrous instrument—which looked not unlike an ordinary pen—and making no attempt to disobey the desire that possessed him, went back to the gallery. The dark splendid boy, the angelic little girl were all he saw—even of the several children in the gallery—and they seemed to look straight down his eyes into depths where the fragmentary ghosts of unrecorded ancestors gave faint musical response.

"The dead's kindly recognition of the dead," he thought. "But I wish these children were alive."

For a week he haunted the gallery, and the children haunted him. Then he became impatient and angry. "I am mooning like a barren woman," he exclaimed. "I must take the briefest way of getting those youngsters off my mind."

With the help of his secretary, he ransacked the library, and finally brought to light the gallery catalogue which had been named in the inventory. He discovered that his children were the Viscount Tancred and the Lady Blanche Mortlake, son and daughter of the second Earl of Teignmouth. Little wiser than before, he sat down at once and wrote to the present earl, asking for some account of the lives of the children. He awaited the answer with more restlessness than he usually permitted himself, and took long walks, ostentatiously avoiding the gallery.

"I believe those youngsters have obsessed me," he thought, more than once. "They certainly are beautiful enough, and the last time I looked at them in that waning light they were fairly alive. Would that they were, and scampering about this park."

The earl, who was intensely grateful to him, answered promptly.

"I am afraid," he wrote, "that I don't know much about my ancestors—those who didn't do something or other; but I have a vague remembrance of having been told by an aunt of mine, who lives on the family traditions—she isn't married—that the little chap was drowned in the river, and that the little girl died, too—I mean when she was a little girl—wasted away, or something—I'm such a beastly idiot about expressing myself, that I wouldn't dare to write to you at all if you weren't really great. That is actually all I can tell you, and I am afraid the painter was their only biographer."

The author was gratified that the girl had died young, but grieved for the boy. Although he had avoided the

gallery of late, his practised imagination had evoked from the throngs of history the high-handed and brilliant, surely adventurous career of the third Earl of Teignmouth. He had pondered upon the deep delights of directing such a mind and character, and had caught himself envying the dust that was older still. When he read of the lad's early death, in spite of his regret that such promise should have come to naught, he admitted to a secret thrill of satisfaction that the boy had so soon ceased to belong to any one. Then, he smiled with both sadness and humor.

"What an old fool I am!" he admitted. "I believe I not only wish those children were alive, but that they were my own."

The frank admission proved fatal. He made straight for the gallery. The boy, after the interval of separation, seemed more spiritedly alive than ever, the little girl to suggest, with her faint appealing smile, that she would like to be taken up and cuddled.

"I must try another way," he thought, desperately, after that long communion. "I must write them out of me."

He went back to the library and locked up the *tour de force* which had ceased to command his classic faculty. At once, he began to write the story of the brief lives of the children, much to the amazement of that faculty, which was little accustomed to the simplicities. Nevertheless, before he had written three chapters, he knew that he was at work upon a masterpiece—and more; that he was experiencing a pleasure so keen that once and again his hand trembled, and he saw the page through a mist. Although his characters had always been, in a measure, realized by himself and his more patient readers, none knew better than he—a man of no delusions—that they were but mentalities, not the pulsing, living creations of the more full-blooded genius. But he had been content to have it so. His creations might find and leave him cold, but he had known his highest satisfaction in

chiseling the statuettes, extracting subtle and elevating harmonies, while combining words as no man of his tongue had combined them before.

But the children were not puppets. He had loved and brooded over them long ere he had thought to tuck them into his pen, and on its first stroke they danced out alive. The old mansion echoed with their laughter, with their delightful and original pranks; Mr. Orth knew nothing of children; therefore, all the pranks he invented were as original as his faculty. The little girl clung to his hand or knee as they both followed the adventurous course of their common idol, the boy. When he realized how alive they were he opened each room of the house to them in turn, that evermore he might have sacred and poignant memories with all parts of the habitation where he must dwell alone to the end. He selected their bedrooms, and hovered over them—not through infantile disorders, which were beyond even his imagination, but through those painful intervals incident upon the enterprising spirit of the boy and the devoted obedience of the girl to fraternal command. He ignored the second Earl of Teignmouth; he was himself their father, and he admired himself extravagantly for the first time; art had chastened him long since. Oddly enough, the children had no mother, not even the memory of one.

He wrote the book more slowly than was his wont, and spent delightful hours pondering upon the chapter of the morrow. He looked forward to the conclusion with a sort of terror, and made up his mind that when the inevitable last word was written he would start at once for Homburg. Incalculable times a day he went to the gallery, for he no longer had any desire to write the children out of his mind, and his eyes hungered for them. They were his now. It was with an effort that he sometimes humorously reminded himself that another man had fathered them and that their little skeletons were under the choir of the chapel. Not even for peace of mind

would he have descended into the vaults of the lords of Chillingsworth and looked upon the marble effigies of his children. Nevertheless, when in a super-humorous mood, he dwelt upon his high satisfaction in having been enabled by his great-aunt to purchase all that was left of them.

For two months he lived in his fool's paradise, and then he knew that the book must end. He nerved himself to nurse the little girl through her wasting illness, and when he clasped her hands, his own shook, his knees trembled. Desolation settled upon the house, and he wished he had left one corner of it to which he could retreat unhaunted by the child's presence. He took long tramps, avoiding the river with a sensation next to panic. It was two days before he got back to his table, and then he had made up his mind to let the boy live. To kill him off, too, was more than his augmented stock of human nature could endure. After all, the lad's death had been purely accidental, wanton. It was just that he should live—with one of the author's inimitable suggestions of future greatness; but, at the end, the parting was almost as bitter as the other. Orth knew then how men feel when their sons go forth to encounter the world and ask no more of the old companionship.

The author's boxes were packed. He sent the manuscript to his publisher an hour after it was finished—he could not have given it a final reading to have saved it from failure—directed his secretary to examine the proof under a microscope, and left the next morning for Homburg. There, in inmost circles, he forgot his children. He visited in several of the great houses of the Continent until November; then returned to London to find his book the literary topic of the day. His secretary handed him the reviews; and for once he read the finalities of the nameless. He found himself hailed as a genius, and compared in astonished phrases to the prodigiously clever talent which the world for twenty years had isolated under the name of Ralph

Orth. This pleased him, for every writer is human enough to wish to be hailed as a genius, and immediately. Many are, and many wait; it depends upon the fashion of the moment, and the needs and bias of those who write of writers. Orth had waited twenty years; but his pathway was strewn with the head-stones of geniuses long since forgotten. He was gratified to come thus publicly into his estate, but soon reminded himself that all the adulation of which a belated world was capable could not give him one thrill of the pleasure which the companionship of that book had given him, while creating. It was the keenest pleasure in his memory, and when a man is fifty and has written many books, that is saying a great deal.

He allowed what society was in town to lavish honors on him for something over a month, then, canceled all his engagements and went down to Chillingsworth.

His estate was in Hertfordshire, that county of gentle hills and tangled lanes, of ancient oaks and wide wild heaths, of historic houses, and dark woods, and green fields innumerable—a Wordsworthian shire, steeped in the deepest peace of England. As Orth drove toward his own gates he had the typical English sunset to gaze upon, a red streak with a church spire against it. His woods were silent. In the fields, the cows stood as if conscious of their part. The ivy on his old gray towers had been young with his children.

He spent a haunted night, but the next day stranger happenings began.

II

He rose early, and went for one of his long walks. England seems to cry out to be walked upon, and Orth, like others of the transplanted, experienced to the full the country's gift of foot-restlessness and mental calm. Calm flees, however, when the ego is rampant, and to-day, as upon others too recent, Orth's soul was as

restless as his feet. He had walked for two hours when he entered the wood of his neighbor's estate, a domain seldom honored by him, as it, too, had been bought by an American—a flighty hunting widow, who displeased the fastidious taste of the author. He heard children's voices, and turned with the quick prompting of retreat.

As he did so, he came face to face on the narrow path with a little girl. For the moment he was possessed by the most hideous sensation which can visit a man's being—abject terror. He believed that body and soul were disintegrating. The child before him was his child, the original of a portrait in which the artist, dead two centuries ago, had missed exact fidelity, after all. The difference, even his rolling vision took note, lay in the warm pure living whiteness and the deeper spiritual suggestion of the child in the path. Fortunately for his self-respect, his surrender lasted but a moment. The little girl spoke.

"You look real sick," she said. "Shall I lead you home?"

The voice was soft and sweet, but the intonation, the vernacular, were American, and not of the highest class. The shock was, if possible, more agonizing than the other, but this time Orth rose to the occasion.

"Who are you?" he demanded, with asperity. "What is your name? Where do you live?"

The child smiled, an angelic smile, although she was evidently amused. "I never had so many questions asked me all at once," she said. "But I don't mind, and I'm glad you're not sick. I'm Mrs. Jennie Root's little girl—my father's dead. My name is Blanche—you *are* sick! No?—and I live in Rome, New York state. We've come over here to visit pa's relations."

Orth took the child's hand in his. It was very warm and soft.

"Take me to your mother," he said, firmly; "now, at once. You can return and play afterward. And as I wouldn't have you disappointed for

the world, I'll send to town to-day for a beautiful doll."

The little girl, whose face had fallen, flashed her delight, but walked with great dignity beside him. He groaned in his depths as he saw that they were pointing for the widow's house, but made up his mind that he would know the history of the child and of all her ancestors, if he had to sit down at table with his obnoxious neighbor. To his surprise, however, the child did not lead him into the park, but toward one of the old stone houses of the tenantry.

"Pa's great-great-great-grandfather lived there," she remarked, with all an American's pride of ancestry. Orth did not smile, however. Only the warm clasp of the hand in his, the soft thrilling voice of his still mysterious companion, prevented him from feeling as if moving through the mazes of one of his own famous ghost stories.

The child ushered him into the dining-room, where an old man was seated at the table reading his Bible. The room was at least eight hundred years old. The ceiling was supported by the trunk of a tree, black, and probably petrified. The windows had still their diamond panes, separated, no doubt, by the original lead. Beyond was a large kitchen in which were several women. The old man, who looked patriarchal enough to have laid the foundations of his dwelling, glanced up and regarded the visitor without hospitality. His expression softened as his eyes moved to the child.

"Who 'ave ye brought?" he asked. He removed his spectacles. "Ah!" He rose, and offered the author a chair. At the same moment, the women entered the room.

"Of course you've fallen in love with Blanche, sir," said one of them. "Everybody does."

"Yes, that is it. Quite so." Confusion still prevailing among his faculties, he clung to the naked truth. "This little girl has interested and startled me because she bears a precise resemblance to one of the portraits in Chillingsworth—painted about

two hundred years ago. Such extraordinary likenesses do not occur without reason, as a rule, and, as I admired my portrait so deeply that I have written a story about it, you will not think it unnatural if I am more than curious to discover the reason for this resemblance. The little girl tells me that her ancestors lived in this very house, and as my little girl lived next door, so to speak, there undoubtedly is a natural reason for the resemblance."

His host closed the Bible, put his spectacles in his pocket, and hobbled out of the house.

"He'll never talk of family secrets," said an elderly woman, who introduced herself as the old man's daughter, and had placed bread and milk before the guest. "There are secrets in every family, and we have ours, but he'll never tell those old tales. All I can tell you is that an ancestor of little Blanche went to wreck and ruin because of some fine lady's doings, and killed himself. The story is that his boys turned out bad. One of them saw his crime, and never got over the shock; he was foolish like, after. The mother was a poor scared sort of creature, and hadn't much influence over the other boy. There seemed to be a blight on all the man's descendants, until one of them went to America. Since then, they haven't prospered, exactly, but they've done better, and they don't drink so heavy."

"They haven't done so well," remarked a worn patient-looking woman. Orth typed her as belonging to the small middle-class of an interior town of the eastern United States.

"You are not the child's mother?"

"Yes, sir. Everybody is surprised; you needn't apologize. She doesn't look like any of us, although her brothers and sisters are good enough for anybody to be proud of. But we all think she strayed in by mistake, for she looks like any lady's child, and, of course, we're only middle-class."

Orth gasped. It was the first time he had ever heard a native American use the term middle-class with a per-

sonal application. For the moment, he forgot the child. His analytical mind raked in the new specimen. He questioned, and learned that the woman's husband had kept a hat-store in Rome, New York; that her boys were clerks, her girls in stores, or type-writing. They kept her and little Blanche—who had come after her other children were well grown—in comfort; and they were all very happy together. The boys broke out, occasionally; but, on the whole, were the best in the world, and her girls were worthy of far better than they had. All were robust, except Blanche. "She coming so late, when I was no longer young, makes her delicate," she remarked, with a slight blush, the signal of her chaste Americanism; "but I guess she'll get along all right. She couldn't have better care if she was a queen's child."

Orth, who had gratefully consumed the bread and milk, rose. "Is that really all you can tell me?" he asked.

"That's all," replied the daughter of the house. "And you couldn't pry open father's mouth."

Orth shook hands cordially with all of them, for he could be charming when he chose. He offered to escort the little girl back to her playmates in the wood, and she took prompt possession of his hand. As he was leaving, he turned suddenly to Mrs. Root. "Why did you call her Blanche?" he asked.

"She was so white and dainty, she just looked it."

Orth took the next train for London, and from the Earl of Teignmouth obtained the address of the aunt who lived on the family traditions, and a cordial note of introduction to her. He then spent an hour anticipating, in a toy-shop, the whims and pleasures of a child—an incident of paternity which his book-children had not inspired. He bought the finest doll, piano, French dishes, cooking apparatus, and playhouse in the shop, and signed a cheque for thirty pounds with a sensation of positive rapture. Then he took the train for Lancashire,

where the Lady Mildred Mortlake lived in another ancestral home.

Possibly there are few imaginative writers who have not a leaning, secret or avowed, to the occult. The creative gift is in very close relationship with the Great Force behind the universe; for aught we know, each may be an atom thereof. It is not strange, therefore, that the lesser and closer of the unseen forces should send their vibrations to it occasionally; or, at all events, that the imagination should incline its ear to the most mysterious and picturesque of all beliefs. Orth frankly dallied with the old dogma. He formulated no personal faith of any sort, but his creative faculty, that ego within an ego, had made more than one excursion into the invisible and brought back literary treasure.

The Lady Mildred received with sweetness and warmth the generous contributor to the family sieve, and listened with fluttering interest to all he had not told the world—she had read the book—and to the strange, Americanized sequel.

"I am all at sea," concluded Orth. "What had my little girl to do with the tragedy? What relation was she to the lady who drove the young man to destruction—?"

"The closest," interrupted Lady Mildred. "She was herself!"

Orth stared at her. Again he had a confused sense of disintegration. Lady Mildred, gratified by the success of her bolt, proceeded less dramatically:

"Wally was up here just after I read your book, and I discovered he had given you the wrong history of the picture. Not that he knew it. It is a story we have left untold as often as possible, and I tell it to you only because you would probably become a monomaniac if I didn't. Blanche Mortlake—that Blanche—there had been several of her name, but there has not been one since—did not die in childhood, but lived to be twenty-four. She was an angelic child, but little angels sometimes grow up into very naughty girls. I believe she was deli-

cate as a child, which probably gave her that spiritual look. Perhaps she was spoiled and flattered, until her poor little soul was stifled, which is likely. At all events, she was the coquette of her day—she seemed to care for nothing but breaking hearts; and she did not stop when she married, either. She hated her husband, and became reckless. She had no children. So far, the tale is not an uncommon one; but the worst, and what makes the ugliest stain in our annals, is to come.

"She was alone one Summer at Chillingsworth—where she had taken temporary refuge from her husband—and she amused herself—some say, fell in love—with a young man of the yeomanry, a tenant of the next estate. His name was Root. He, so it comes down to us, was a magnificent specimen of his kind, and in those days the yeomanry gave us our great soldiers. His beauty of face was quite as remarkable as his physique; he led all the rural youth in sport, and was a bit above his class in every way. He had a wife in no way remarkable, and two little boys, but was always more with his friends than his family. Where he and Blanche Mortlake met I don't know—in the woods, probably, although it has been said that he had the run of the house. But, at all events, he was wild about her, and she pretended to be about him. Perhaps she was, for women have stooped before and since. Some women can be stormed by a fine man in any circumstances; but, although I am a woman of the world, and not easy to shock, there are some things I tolerate so hardly that it is all I can do to bring myself to believe in them; and stooping is one of them. Well, they were the scandal of the county for months, and then, either because she had tired of her new toy, or his grammar grated after the first glamour, or because she feared her husband, who was returning from the Continent, she broke off with him and returned to town. He followed her, and forced his way into her house. It is said she melted, but made

him swear never to attempt to see her again. He returned to his home, and killed himself. A few months later she took her own life. That is all I know."

"It is quite enough for me," said Orth.

The next night, as his train traveled over the great wastes of Lancashire, a thousand chimneys were spouting forth columns of fire. Where the sky was not red it was black. The place looked like hell. Another time Orth's imagination would have gathered immediate inspiration from this wildest region of England. The fair and peaceful counties of the south had nothing to compare in infernal grandeur with these acres of flaming columns. The chimneys were invisible in the lower darkness of the night; the fires might have leaped straight from the angry caldron of the earth.

But Orth was in a subjective world, searching for all he had ever heard of occultism. He recalled that the sinful dead are doomed, according to this belief, to linger for vast reaches of time in that borderland which is close to earth, eventually sent back to work out their final salvation; that they work it out among the descendants of the people they have wronged; that suicide is held by the devotees of occultism to be a cardinal sin, abhorred and execrated.

Authors are far closer to the truths enfolded in mystery than ordinary people, because of that very audacity of imagination which irritates their plodding critics. As only those who dare to make mistakes succeed greatly, only those who shake free the wings of their imagination brush, once in a way, the secrets of the great pale world. If such writers go wrong, it is not for the mere brains to tell them so.

Upon Orth's return to Chillingsworth, he called at once upon the child, and found her happy among his gifts. She put her arms about his neck, and covered his serene unlined face with soft kisses. This completed the conquest. Orth from that moment adored her as a child, irrespective of the psychological problem.

Gradually, he managed to monopolize her. From long walks it was but a step to take her home for luncheon. The hours of her visits lengthened. He had a room fitted up as a nursery and filled with the wonders of toyland. He took her to London to see the pantomimes; two days before Christmas, to buy presents for her relatives; and together they strung them upon the most wonderful Christmas tree that the old hall of Chillingsworth had ever embraced. She had a donkey-cart and a trained nurse, disguised as a maid, to wait upon her. Before a month had passed she was living in state at Chillingsworth and paying daily visits to her mother. Mrs. Root was deeply flattered, and apparently well content. Orth told her plainly that he should make the child independent, and educate her, meanwhile. Mrs. Root intended to spend six months in England, and Orth was in no hurry to alarm her by broaching his ultimate design.

He reformed Blanche's accent and vocabulary, and read to her out of books which would have addled the brains of most little maids of six, but she seemed to enjoy them, although she seldom made a comment. He was always ready to play games with her, but she was a gentle little thing, and, moreover, tired easily. She preferred to sit in the depths of a big chair, toasting her bare toes at the log-fire in the hall, while her friend read or talked to her. Although she was thoughtful, and, when left to herself, given to dreaming, his patient observation could detect nothing uncanny about her. Moreover, she had a quick sense of humor, she was easily amused, and could laugh as merrily as any child in the world. He was resigning all hope of further development on the shadowy side when one day he took her to the picture gallery.

It was the first warm day of Summer. The gallery was not heated, and he had not dared to take his frail visitor into its chilly spaces during the Winter and Spring. Although he had wished to see the effect of the pic-

ture on the child, he had shrunk from the bare possibility of the very development the mental part of him craved; the other was warmed and satisfied for the first time in his life, and withheld itself from disturbance. But one day the sun streamed through the old windows, and, obeying a sudden impulse, he led Blanche to the gallery.

It was some time before he approached the child of his earlier love. Again he hesitated. He pointed out many other fine pictures, and Blanche smiled appreciatively at his remarks, that were wise in criticism and interesting in matter. He never knew just how much she understood, but the very fact that there were depths in the child beyond his probing riveted his chains.

Suddenly, he wheeled about and waved his hand to her prototype. "What do you think of that?" he asked. "You remember, I told you of the likeness the day I met you."

She looked indifferently at the picture, but he noticed that her color changed oddly; its pure white tone gave place to an equally delicate gray.

"I have seen it before," she said. "I came in here one day to look at it. And I have been quite often since. You never forbade me," she added, looking at him appealingly, but dropping her eyes quickly. "And I like the little girl—and the boy—very much."

"Do you? Why?"

"I don't know"—a formula in which she had taken refuge before. Still her candid eyes were lowered; but she was quite calm. Orth, instead of questioning, merely fixed his eyes upon her, and waited. In a moment she stirred uneasily, but she did not laugh nervously, as another child would have done. He had never seen her self-possession ruffled, and he had begun to doubt he ever should. She was full of human warmth and affection. She seemed made for love, and every creature who came within her ken adored her, from the author himself down to the litter of puppies presented to her by the stable-boy a few weeks

since; but her serenity would hardly be enhanced by death.

She raised her eyes, finally, but not to his. She looked at the portrait.

"Did you know that there was another picture behind?" she asked.

"No," replied Orth, turning cold. "How did you know it?"

"One day I touched a spring in the frame, and this picture came forward. Shall I show you?"

"Yes!" And crossing curiosity and the involuntary shrinking from impending phenomena was a sensation of esthetic disgust that *he* should be treated to a secret spring.

The little girl touched hers, and that other Blanche sprang aside so quickly that she might have been impelled by a sharp blow from behind. Orth narrowed his eyes and stared at what she revealed. He felt that his own Blanche was watching him, and set his features, although his breath was short.

There was the Lady Blanche Mortlake in the splendor of her young womanhood, beyond a doubt. Gone were all traces of her spiritual childhood, except, perhaps, in the shadows of the mouth; but more than fulfilled were the promises of her mind. Assuredly, the woman had been as brilliant and gifted as she had been restless and passionate. She wore her very pearls with arrogance, her very hands were tense with eager life, her whole being breathed mutiny.

Orth turned abruptly to Blanche, who had transferred her attention to the picture.

"What a tragedy is there!" he exclaimed, with a fierce attempt at lightness. "Think of a woman having all that pent up within her two centuries ago! And at the mercy of a stupid family, no doubt, and a still stupider husband. No wonder—To-day, a woman like that might not be a model of all the virtues, but she certainly would use her gifts and become famous, the while living her life too fully to have any place in it for yeomen and such, or even for the trivial business of breaking hearts." He put his finger under Blanche's chin, and raised her face,

but he could not compel her gaze. "You are the exact image of that little girl," he said, "except that you are even purer and finer. She had no chance, none whatever. You live in the woman's age. Your opportunities will be infinite. I shall see to it that they are. What you wish to be you shall be. There will be no pent-up energies here to burst out into disaster for yourself and others. You shall be trained to self-control—that is, if you ever develop self-will, dear child—every faculty shall be educated, every school of life you desire knowledge through shall be opened to you. You shall become that finest flower of civilization, a woman who knows how to use her independence."

She raised her eyes, slowly, and gave him a look which stirred the roots of sensation—a long look of unspeakable melancholy. Her chest rose once; then, she set her lips tightly, and dropped her eyes.

"What do you mean?" he cried, roughly, for his soul was chattering. "Is—it—do you—?" He dared not go too far, and concluded lamely, "You mean you fear that your mother will not give you to me when she goes—you have divined that I wish to adopt you? Answer me, will you?"

But she only lowered her head and turned away, and he, fearing to frighten or repel her, apologized for his abruptness, restored the outer picture to its place and led her from the gallery.

He sent her at once to the nursery, and when she came down to luncheon and took her place at his right hand, she was as natural and childlike as ever. For some days he restrained his curiosity, but one evening, as they were sitting before the fire in the hall listening to the storm, and just after he had told her the story of the erling, he took her on his knee and asked her gently if she would not tell him what had been in her thoughts when he had drawn her brilliant future. Again her face turned gray, and she dropped her eyes.

"I cannot," she said. "I—perhaps—I don't know."

"Was it what I suggested?"

She shook her head, then looked at him with a shrinking appeal which forced him to drop the subject.

He went the next day alone to the gallery, and looked long at the portrait of the woman. She stirred no response in him. Nor could he feel that the woman of Blanche's future would stir the man in him. The paternal was all he had to give, but that was hers for ever.

He went out into the park and found Blanche digging in her garden, very dirty and absorbed. The next afternoon, however, entering the hall noiselessly, he saw her sitting in her big chair, gazing out into nothing visible, her whole face settled in melancholy. He asked her if she were ill, and she recalled herself at once, but confessed to feeling tired. Soon after this he noticed that she lingered longer in the comfortable depths of her chair, and seldom went out, except with himself. She insisted that she was quite well, but after he had surprised her again looking as sad as if she had renounced every joy of childhood, he invited from London a doctor renowned for his success with children.

The scientist came and questioned and examined her. When she had left the room he shrugged his shoulders.

"She might have been born with ten years of life in her, or she might grow up into a buxom woman," he said. "I confess I cannot tell. She appears to be sound enough, but I have no X-rays in my eyes, and for all I know she may be on the verge of decay. She certainly has the look of those who die young. I have never seen so spiritual a child. But I can put my finger on nothing. Keep her out of doors, don't give her sweets, and don't let her catch anything if you can help it."

Orth and the child spent the long warm days of Summer under the trees of the park, or driving in the quiet lanes. Guests were unbidden, and his pen was idle. All that was human in

him had gone out to Blanche. He loved her, and she was a perpetual delight to him. The rest of the world received the large measure of his indifference. There was no further change in her, and apprehension slept and let him sleep. He had persuaded Mrs. Root to remain in England for a year. He sent her theatre tickets every week, and placed a horse and phaëton at her disposal. She was enjoying herself and seeing less and less of Blanche. He took the child to Bournemouth for a fortnight, and again to Scotland, both of which outings benefited as much as they pleased her. She had begun to tyrannize over him amiably, and she carried herself quite royally. But she was always sweet and truthful, and these qualities, combined with that something in the depths of her mind which defied his explorations, held him captive. She was devoted to him, and cared for no other companion, although she was demonstrative to her mother when they met.

It was in the tenth month of this idyll of the lonely man and the lonely child that Mrs. Root flurriedly entered the library of Chillingsworth, where Orth happened to be alone.

"Oh, sir," she exclaimed, "I must go home. My daughter Grace writes me—she should have done it before—that the boys are not behaving as well as they should—she didn't tell me, as I was having such a good time she just hated to worry me—heaven knows I've had enough worry—but now I must go—I just couldn't stay—boys are an awful responsibility—girls ain't a circumstance to them, although mine are a handful sometimes."

Orth had written about too many women to interrupt the flow. He let her talk until she paused to recuperate her forces. Then, he said, quietly:

"I am sorry this has come so suddenly, for it forces me to broach a subject, at once, which I would rather have postponed until you could have accustomed yourself to the idea by degrees—"

"I know what it is you want to say, sir," she broke in, "and I've reproached

myself that I haven't warned you before, but I didn't like to be the one to speak first. You want Blanche—of course, I couldn't help seeing that; but I can't let her go, sir, indeed, I can't."

"Yes," he said, firmly, "I want to adopt Blanche, and I hardly think you can refuse, for you must know how greatly it will be to her advantage. She is a wonderful child; you have never been blind to that; she should have every opportunity, not only of money, but of association. If I adopt her legally, I shall, of course, make her my heir, and—there is no reason why she should not grow up as great a lady as any in England."

The poor woman turned white, and burst into tears. "I've sat up nights and nights, struggling," she said, when she could speak. "That, and missing her. I couldn't stand in her light, and I let her stay. I know I oughtn't to, now—I mean, stand in her light—but, sir, she is dearer than all the others put together."

"Then, live here in England—at least, for some years longer. I will gladly relieve your children of your support, and you can see Blanche as often as you choose."

"I can't do that, sir. After all, she is only one, and there are six others. I can't desert them. They all need me, if only to keep them together—three girls unmarried and out in the world, and three boys just a little inclined to be wild. There is another point, sir—I don't exactly know how to say it."

"Well?" asked Orth, kindly. This American woman thought him the ideal gentleman, although the mistress of the estate on which she visited called him a boor and a snob.

"It is—well—you must know—you can imagine—that her brothers and sisters just worship Blanche. They save their pennies to buy her everything she wants—or used to want. Heaven knows what will satisfy her now, although I can't see that she's one bit spoiled. But she's just like a religion to them; they're not much on church. I'll tell you, sir, what I

couldn't say to any one else, not even to these relations who've been so kind to me—but there's wildness, just a streak, in all my children, and I believe, I know, it's Blanche that keeps them straight. My girls get bitter, sometimes; work all the week and little fun, not caring for common men and no chance to marry gentlemen; and sometimes they break out and talk dreadful; then, when they're over it, they say they'll live for Blanche—they've said it over and over, and they mean it. Every sacrifice they've made for her—and they've made many—has done them good. It isn't that Blanche ever says a word of the preachy sort, or has anything of the Sunday-school child about her, or even tries to smooth them down when they're excited. It's just herself. The only thing she ever does is sometimes to draw herself up and look scornful, and that nearly kills them. Little as she is, they're crazy about having her respect. I've grown superstitious about her. Until she came I used to get frightened, terribly, sometimes, and I believe she came for that. So—you see! I know Blanche is too fine for us and ought to have the best; but, then, they are to be considered, too. They have their rights, and they've got much more good than bad in them. I don't know! I don't know! It's kept me awake many nights."

Orth rose, abruptly. "Perhaps you will take some further time to think it over," he said. "You can stay a few weeks longer—the matter cannot be so pressing as that."

The woman rose. "I've thought this," she said; "let Blanche decide. I believe she knows more than any of us. I believe that whichever way she decided would be right. I won't say anything to her, so you won't think I'm working on her feelings; and I can trust you. But she'll know."

"Why do you think that?" asked Orth, sharply. "There is nothing uncanny about the child. She is not yet seven years of age. Why should you place such a responsibility upon her?"

"Do you think she's like other children?"

"I know nothing of other children."

"I do, sir. I've raised six. And I've seen hundreds of others. I never was one to be a fool about my own, but Blanche isn't like any other child living—I'm certain of it."

"What do you think?"

And the woman answered, according to her lights: "I think she's an angel, and came to us because we needed her."

"And I think she is Blanche Mortlake working out the last of her salvation," thought the author; but he made no reply, and was alone in a moment.

It was several days before he spoke to Blanche, and then, one morning, when she was sitting on her mat on the lawn with the light full upon her, he told her abruptly that her mother must return home.

To his surprise, but unutterable delight, she burst into tears and flung herself into his arms.

"You need not leave me," he said, when he could find his own voice. "You can stay here always and be my little girl. It all rests with you."

"I can't stay!" she sobbed. "I can't!"

"And that is what made you so sad once or twice?" he asked, with a double eagerness.

She made no reply.

"Oh!" he said, passionately, "give me your confidence, Blanche. You are the only breathing thing that I have ever loved."

"If I could, I would," she said. "But I don't know—not quite."

"How much do you know?"

But she sobbed again, and would not answer. He dared not risk too much. After all, the physical barrier between the past and the present was very young.

"Very well, then, we will talk about the other matter. I will not pretend to disguise the fact that your mother is distressed at the idea of parting from you, and thinks it would be as

sad for your brothers and sisters, whom she says you influence for their good. Do you think that you do?"

"Yes."

"How do you know this?"

"Do you know why you know everything?"

"No, my dear, and I have great respect for your instincts. But your sisters and brothers are now old enough to take care of themselves. They must be of poor stuff if they cannot live properly without the aid of a child. Moreover, they will be marrying soon. That will also mean that your mother will have many little grandchildren to console her for your loss. I will be the one bereft, if you leave me. I am the only one who really needs you. I don't say I will go to the bad, as you may have very foolishly persuaded yourself your family will do without you, but I trust to your instincts to make you realize how unhappy, how inconsolable, I shall be. I shall be the loneliest man on earth. And without hope!"

She rubbed her face deeper into his flannels, and tightened her embrace. "Can't you come, too?" she asked.

"No; you must live with me wholly, or not at all. Your people are not my people, their ways are not my ways. We should not get along. And if you lived with me over there you might as well stay here, for your influence over them would be quite as removed. Moreover, if they are of the right stuff the memory of you will be quite as potent for good as your actual presence."

"Not unless I died."

Again, something within him trembled. "Do you believe you are going to die young?" he blurted out.

But she would not answer.

He entered the nursery abruptly the next day and found her packing her dolls. When she saw him, she sat down and began to weep hopelessly. He knew then that his fate was sealed. And when, a year later, he received her last little scrawl, he was almost glad that she went when she did.



TRAGEDY

ONLY a simple woman she, whom Love,
In some sad, listless way, grew weary of.

So plain the fact, so commonplace the thing,
Empty and cheap and void of coloring.

Yet all the tragedies of earth, I wis,
Have nothing in their wounds that hurt like this.

No grand, sharp blow, sudden to ease the pain;
Only the ceaseless ache of heart and brain.

The uselessness of toil and life and soul—
A causeless journey to a dreary goal.

Only a simple woman she, whom Love
Waxed weary of.

McCREA PICKERING.



AT his own wedding a man is never the best man—and but rarely afterward.

THE WIRE-TAPPERS

By Arthur Stringer

THE discharged prisoner hung back, blinking out at the strong sunlight. When the way at last seemed clear, he thrust his hands deep in his pockets, and sauntered carelessly toward Sixth avenue. At the corner, a crowd of idlers watched two men on a scaffolding, cleaning the stone of Jefferson Market with a sand-blast. It was not until he had shuffled his way in on one side of this crowd, and edged circuitously out on the other that he felt at ease with the world. It was like dipping into a stream; it seemed to wash away something scarlet and flaming. A touch of the familiar bravado came back to his boyish face; each insouciant shoulder took on its old line of reckless amiability.

He crossed Sixth avenue with quicker steps, and pushed his way into a saloon on the corner of Tenth street, vaguely wondering what the next turn of life's wheel would bring to him. But, at heart, he was still sick and shaken and weak. He called for a beer, and, between gulps of it, swallowed down slices of pickled beets and the last of the free-lunch bread and crackers. Seeing the bartender eying him angrily, he laughed, conciliatingly, and put down his last nickel for another beer.

It was not until then that he noticed the stranger beside him, looking at him pointedly. He was corpulent, and friendly enough of face, but for the blocked squareness of the flaccid jaw and the indefinite pale-green glint to the deep-set, predatory eyes. He was floridly dressed, with a heavy, chased-gold band on one fat finger, and a small, diamond stud in his shirt-front. There was, too, something beefily ani-

mal-like in his confident, massive neck, and the discharged prisoner returned his half-quizzical gaze of inspection with a glare unmistakably belligerent. The stranger merely smiled, and leaned amiably against the bar.

"What'll you have, Durkin?" he asked, easily.

The other still glared at him in silence.

"Climb down, my boy; climb down, and have something with me!"

"Who're *you*, anyway?" demanded Durkin, coldly.

"Oh, I was just watchin' you over yonder!" The stout man jerked his head vaguely toward Jefferson Market, and turned to the bartender. "Give us some brandy, Terry, and a plate o' hot beans and sandwiches. Yes, I was kind o' lookin' on over there; you're up against it, aren't you?"

"How d'you mean?" asked the young man, hungrily eying the leg of ham, from which the bartender was shaving dolefully thin slices.

"Here, brace up on a swig of Terry's nose-paint; then we can talk easier. Hold on, though; let's get comfortable!"

He ordered the lunch over to a little round table in the corner. Durkin could already feel the liquor singing through his veins; and he decided to get some hot beans inside him before trying to break away.

"Now, first thing, do you want a cinch on a good job?"

"Maybe," said Durkin, through a mouthful of beans. "Doing what?"

"Same old thing—operating, of course."

Durkin hated to fall out with the

stranger while that plate of steaming beans stood still unconsumed; so, he parried for time.

"I'm kind o' sick of operating," he mumbled, washing a mouthful of his lunch down with a glass of brandy. "My arm's giving out."

"Well, I want a man, and I want him quick. You're not very well fixed, maybe?"

"Oh, I'm broke, all right!" laughed the other, weakly, surrendering to some clutching tide of alcoholic recklessness.

"Well, you're a fool to go broke in the teeth of a cinch like this. But first thing, how'd you ever get pinched by Doogan? Here, take a drink—hot stuff, eh? Now, how'd you get pulled that fool way?"

"Oh, I'd been living like a street-cat for a week," said Durkin, wiping his mouth, "and a friend of mine showed me a wire back of his roof, and advanced me five dollars to short-circuit it. Doogan's men caught me at it, and Doogan tried to make me out an ord'nary overhead guerrilla." And, through a mouthful of hot beans, he cursed his captor roundly.

"But you saw he didn't appear against you?"

"Yes, and that's more'n I can get onto," he answered, puzzled by the stranger's quiet smile.

"Say, Durkin, you didn't think it was your good looks got you off, did you?" The younger man looked at him out of half-angry eyes, but the stranger only continued to chuckle in his throat.

"I fixed Doogan for you," he went on, easily. "You're the sort of man I wanted—I saw that, first thing; and a friend o' mine kind o' dropped in and saw Doogan!"

The younger man gazed at him in dreamy wonder, trying to grope through the veil of unreality that seemed falling about him. Then, he listened, with suddenly alert eyes, as the stranger, to make sure of his man, tapped with a knife on the edge of his plate. Durkin read the Morse easily—"Don't talk so loud"—and wagged his head childishly over the little message, under the keen eyes of the stranger.

"Where'd you work, before you went with the Postal Union?"

"Up in the woods," laughed the other, as he rambled. "I was a despatcher for the Grand Trunk at Komoko, where the tunnel trains cut off west for Chicago; and they work their men like dogs. Some way or other, I sent an Oddfellows' excursion head on into a gravel-train—saw it twenty minutes before they touched, and wired in my resign."

"But how'd you come to leave the Postal Union?"

A momentary slyness crept into his eyes, but he laughed weakly, and reached out for another drink; the older man shook his head, and held back the bottle.

"Oh, that's another dose of my luck! They black-listed me, damn 'em!"

The other held up a warning finger. "Not so loud! Go on."

"Of course, I went into the P. U. carrying a fly, so I got along all right. But I kind o' wanted to see a little life, and had telegrapher's paralysis coming on, and got sick of the grind. So, when some of the Aqueduct races were going through on a repeater next to me, to Reedy's pool-rooms, I just reached over and held up one side of the repeater. Then, say third horse won, I got over to the window, and took out my handkerchief three times. Then, a friend of mine 'phoned to our man, and when he'd had time to get his money up I sent the result through. But they got onto the dodge, and soaked me!" Then, he added, regretfully, "I'd have made a clear five hundred, if they'd given me another day's chance!"

"Well, I guess maybe you can even up with us." The younger man looked at the other narrowly, unsteady of eye, but still suspicious. Good grafts, he knew, had to be sought for long and arduously on this earth. "I guess I'd rather get something decent," he grumbled, pushing away his bean-plate, but still waiting, with some anxiety, for the other to explain.

"We all would, maybe; but a dead

sure thing's good enough, now and then."

"But where's all the money, in this cinch?" demanded Durkin.

"I can't tell you that here, but I'm no piker! Get in a cab with me, and then I'll lay everything out as we drive up to the house. But here, have a smoke!" he added, as he got up and hurried out to the door. Durkin had never dreamed that tobacco—even pure, Havana tobacco—could be so suave and mellow and fragrant.

"Now, you asked me about the money in this deal," the older man began, when he had slammed to the cab-door, and they went rumbling toward Fifth avenue. "Well, it's right here, see!" And, as he spoke, he drew a roll of bills from his pocket. Durkin could see that it was made up of many fifties and one-hundreds. He wondered, dazedly, how many thousands it held; it seemed, of a sudden, to put a new and sobering complexion on things.

"Now, if you want to swing in with us, here's what you get a week." The stranger pulled out four crisp fifty-dollar bills, and placed them in the other's bewildered fingers. "And, if our coup goes through, you get your ten-percent. rake off—and that ought to run you up from five to seven thousand dollars, easy!"

Durkin's fingers closed more tightly on his bills, and he drew in his breath, sharply.

"Who *are* you, anyway?" he asked, slowly.

"Me? Oh, I'm kind of an outsider operator, same as yourself!" He looked at Durkin, steadily, for a moment, and then, seeming satisfied, suddenly changed his tone. "Did you ever hear of Penfield, the big pool-room man? Well, I've been a plunger at Penfield's now for two months—long enough to see that he's as crooked as they make them. I'm going to give him a dose of his own medicine, and hit that gilt-edged gambler for a slice of his genteel bank-roll—and a good, generous slice, too!"

"But what's—er—your special line

of business? How're you going to get at Penfield, I mean?"

"Ever hear of the Miami outfit?" asked the other.

"That cut in and hit the Montreal pool-rooms for eighty thousand?—well, I guess I have—a little!" He looked at the other man, in wonder. Then, it all seemed to dawn on him, in one illuminating, almost bewildering flash.

"You—you're not MacNutt?" he cried, reading his answer almost as he spoke. Half a year before, the Postal Union offices had been full of talk of the Miami Outfit and MacNutt, buzzing with meager news of the audacity and cool insolence of Miami's "lightning-slingers," who, when they saw they had worked their game to a finish, cut in with their, "We've got your dough, now you can go to—" as they made for cover and ultimate liberty ten minutes before their hillside cave was raided, and nothing more than a packing-case holding three dozen Brumley dry batteries, a bunch of "KK" and a couple of Crosby long-distance telephones were found.

Durkin looked at the other man once more, almost admiringly, indeterminedly tempted, swayed against his will, in some way, by the splendor of a vast and unknown hazard.

"You're pretty confidential," he said, slowly, looking the other up and down. "What's to stop me squealing on you and the whole gang?"

MacNutt smiled, gently, and stroked his scrawny beard, touched here and there with gray. "What good would all that do you?" he asked.

"You *are* a cool cuss!" ejaculated the other.

"Oh, I guess I know men; and I sized you up, first thing, in the courtroom. You're the make of man I want, and—well, if you don't come out of this quite a few thousand to the good, it's all your own fault!"

Durkin whistled softly, and looked out at the flashing carriages as they threaded their way up the crowded Avenue. "Well, I guess I'm game enough!" he said, hesitatingly, still trying to sweep from his brain the

teasing mental cobweb that it was nothing more than a vivid nightmare. "I guess I'm your man," he repeated, as they turned off the Avenue, and drew up in front of a house with a brown-stone front, much like other private houses in New York's upper Thirties. They jumped out, and went quickly up the broad, stone steps.

"So you're with us, all right?" asked MacNutt, as his finger played oddly on the electric button beside the door.

"Yes, I'm with you," assented Durkin, stoutly, "to the finish!"

It was a full minute before the door opened, and the unlooked-for wait in some way keyed the younger man's curiosity up to the snapping point. As the door swung back, he had the startled vision of a young woman, dressed in sober black, looking half-timidly out at them with her hand still on the knob. As he noticed the wealth of her waving, chestnut hair, and the poise of the head, and the quiet calmness of the eyes, that appeared almost a violet-blue in contrast to the soft pallor of her face, Durkin felt that they had made a mistake in the house number. But, seeing MacNutt step quickly inside, he himself awkwardly took off his hat, and, under the spell of her quiet, almost pensive, smile, he decided that she could be little more than a mere girl, until he noticed the womanly fullness of her breast and hips and what seemed a languid weariness about the eyes themselves. He also noted the sudden telepathic glance that passed between MacNutt and the woman, a questioning flash on her part, an answering flash on the other's. Then she turned to Durkin; with her quiet, carelessly winning smile, and held out her hand, and his heart thumped and pounded more drunkenly than it had with all MacNutt's brandy and seltzer. Then, he heard MacNutt speaking, quickly and evenly.

"This is Mr. Jim Durkin; Durkin, this is Miss Mame Candler. You two're going to have lots o' trouble together, so I guess you'd better get acquainted right here—might as well

make it Mame and Jim—you're going to see a mighty good deal of each other!"

"All right, Jim," said the woman, girlishly, in a mellow, English contralto voice; then, she laughed, and Durkin flushed hot and cold as he felt her shaking hands with him once more. Strangely sobered, he stumbled over rugs and polished floors after them, up two flights of stairs, listening, still dazed, to MacNutt's hurried questions and the woman's low answers, which sounded thin and far away to him.

A man named Mackenzie, Durkin gathered from their talk, had been probing about the subway for half a day, and had just strung a wire on which much seemed to depend. They stopped before a heavy, oak-paneled door, on which MacNutt played a six-stroked tattoo. A key turned, and the next moment a middle-aged man in the cap and blue suit of a Consolidated Gas Company inspector, thrust his head cautiously through the opening. The sweat was running down his oily, dirt-smeared face; a look of relief spread over his features at the sight of the others.

The room into which Durkin stepped had once been a sewing-room. In one corner still stood a sewing-machine, in the shadow, incongruously enough, of a large safe with combination lock. Next to this stood a stout work-table, on which was a box relay and a Bunnell sounder. Around the latter were clustered a galvanometer, a 1-2 duplex set, a condenser, and a Wheatstone bridge of the post-office pattern, while about the floor lay coils of copper wire, a pair of lineman's pliers, and a number of scattered tools. Durkin's trained eye saw that the condenser had been in use, to reduce the current from a tapped electric-light wire; while the next moment, his glance fell on a complete wire-tapping outfit, snugly packed away in an innocent-enough looking suit-case. Then, he turned to the two men and the woman, as they bent anxiously over the littered table, where Mackenzie was once more struggling with his instrument, talking quickly

and tensely as he tested and worked and listened.

"Great Scott, Mack, it's easy enough for you to talk, but it was fool's luck, pure fool's luck, I ever got this wire up! First, I had forty feet o' water-pipe, then eighty feet o' brick-wall, then over fifty feet o' cornice, and about twice as much eave-trough, hangin' on all the time by my eye-lashes, and dog-sick waitin' to be pinched with the goods on! Hold on there—what's this?"

The sounder had given out a tremulous little quaver; then a feeble click or two; then was silent once more. "Lost it again!" said Mackenzie, under his breath.

"Let me look over that relay a minute!" broke in Durkin. It was the type of box-relay usually used by linemen, with a Morse key attached to the base-board, and he ran his eye over it quickly. Then, with a deft movement or two he released the binding of the armature lever screws, and, the next moment, the instrument felt the pulse of life, and spoke out clearly and distinctly.

"Listen!" he cried, gleefully, holding up a finger. "That's Corcoran, the old slob! He's sending through the New Orleans returns!" And he chuckled as he listened with inclined ear. "That's Corcoran—same old slob as ever!"

The four silent figures leaned a little closer over the clicking instrument of insensate brass—leaned, intent and motionless, with quickened breathing, and strangely altering faces.

"We've got 'em at last!" said MacNutt, quietly, mopping his face and pacing the little room with feverish steps.

"Yes, we've got 'em!" echoed Mackenzie.

Durkin could feel the woman's breath playing on his neck, and he turned to her, and could see by her quick breath and dilated pupils that she, too, had been reading the wire. And again he wondered, as he looked at her, how she ever came to such a place. To Durkin—who had heard of women bookies and touts in his day—

she seemed so soft, so flowerlike, in her pale womanhood, that she still remained to him one of the mysteries of a mysterious day.

The woman saw the impetuous warmth in his eyes as he gazed up at her, and quickly looked away. "No goo-gooing there, you folks!" broke in MacNutt, brusquely. Then, he turned quickly to the other man. "Now, Mack, we've got to get a move on! Get some of that grime off, and your clothes on—quick!" He turned back to the other two at the operating-table.

"I've certainly got a couple o' good-lookers in you two, all right, all right!" he said, Durkin thought, half-mockingly. "But I want you to get groomed up, Durkin—rigged out complete—before trouble begins, for you're going to move among some kind o' swell people. You two've got to put on a lot of face, to carry this thing through. Remember, I want you to do the swell restaurants, and drive round a good deal, and haunt the Avenue a bit, and drop in at Penfield's lower house whenever you get word from me. You'd better do the theatres now and then, too—I want you to be seen, remember—but always *together!* It may be kind o' hard, not bein' able to pick your friend, Durkin; but Mame knows the ropes, and she'll explain things as you go along."

He turned back, once more, from the doorway.

"Now, remember, don't answer that 'phone unless Mack or me gives the three-four ring! If she rings all night don't answer; and 'Battery Park,' mind, means trouble. When you're tipped off with that get the stuff in the safe, if you can, before you break away. That's all, I guess, for now!" And he joined the man called Mack in the hall, and together they hurried down-stairs, and let themselves out, leaving Durkin and his quiet-eyed colleague alone.

He sat and looked at her, dazed, bewildered, still teased by the veil of unreality which seemed to sway between him and the world about him. It seemed to him as though he were watch-

ing a hurrying, shifting drama from a distance—watching it as he used to watch the Broadway performances from his cramped little gallery seat.

"Am I awake?" he asked, weakly. Then, he laughed recklessly, and turned to her once more, abstractedly rubbing his stubbled chin, and remembering, to his sudden shame, that he had gone unshaved for half a week.

"Yes, it's all very real!" laughed the woman herself, now unrestrainedly; and, for the first time, he noticed her white, regular teeth, as she hurried about, straightening up the belittered room.

During his narrow and busy life Durkin had known few women; never before had he known a woman like this one, with whom destiny had so strangely ordained he should talk and drive, work and plot. He looked once more at her thick, tumbled chestnut hair, at the soft pallor of her oval cheek, and the well-gowned figure, as she stooped over a condenser—wondering within himself how it would all end, and what was the meaning of it.

"Well, this certainly does beat me!" he said, at last, slowly, yet contentedly enough.

The young woman looked at him; and he caught a second glimpse of her wistfully pensive smile, while his heart thumped, in spite of himself. He reached out a hesitating hand, as though to touch her.

"What is it?" she asked, in her mellow English contralto.

"I don't exactly know," he answered, with his hand before his eyes. "I wish you'd tell me!"

She came and sat down in a chair before him, pushing back her tumbled hair with one hand, seeming to be measuring him with her intent gaze. She appeared in some way satisfied with him; it seemed almost as if she had taken his face between her two hands, and read it, feature by feature.

"I hardly know where to begin," she hesitated. "I mean, I don't know how much they've explained to you already. Indeed, there's a great deal I don't understand myself. But, of

course, you know we have tapped Penfield's private wire. And, of course, you know why. He gets all the race returns at the club-house, and then sends them on by private 'phone to his other two pool-rooms. He has to do it that way, now that New York is not so open."

Durkin knew all this, but he waited, for the sake of hearing her voice, and watching the play of her features.

"Every track report, you know, comes into New York by way of the race department of the Postal Union, on lower Broadway. There, messenger-boys hurry about with the reports to the different wire-operators, who wire the returns to the company's different subscribers. Penfield, of course, is really one of them, though it's not generally known."

"But what have you and I to do with all this?" he broke in.

"Quite enough! You see, there's a delay of nearly fifteen minutes, naturally, in getting a result to the pool-rooms. That gives us our chance; so, we hold up the message here, 'phone it at once over to MacNutt's rooms, three doors from Penfield's, and, when he has had time to drop in and place his money, we send through our intercepted message."

"Then Penfield has no idea who or what MacNutt is?"

"He knows him only as a real-estate agent with a passion for plunging, a great deal of money, and—and—" The girl shrugged a rounded shoulder, and did not finish.

"And you—?" Durkin hesitated, in turn.

"Both you and I shall have to drop in, on certain days, and do what we can at Penfield's lower house, while Mackenzie is doing the Madison-avenue place. We've been going there, on and off, for weeks now, getting ready for—for this!"

"Then MacNutt's been working on this scheme for a long time?"

"Yes; this house has been rented by the month, furnished, simply because it stood in about the right place. We've even dropped a few hundred

dollars, altogether, in Penfield's different places. But, in the end, the three of us are to hit Penfield together, on a ragged field, when there's a chance for heavy odds. But, of course, we can do it only once!"

"And then what?" asked Durkin. Again the girl shrugged a shoulder.

"Penfield's patrons are all wealthy men," she went on. "A book of a hundred thousand is common enough; sometimes it goes up to two or three hundred thousand. So, you see, it all depends on our odds. MacNutt himself hopes to make at least a hundred thousand; but then he has worked and brooded over it all so long, I don't think he sees things clearly, now!"

"He seems sharp enough to leave you and me here, though, to take all the risk in a raid," protested Durkin.

"Yes," she assented, wearily, "we take the risk; he supplies the money."

"How did *you* ever get mixed up with—with—in this sort of thing?" Durkin demanded, turning to her, suddenly. The eyes of the two met, for a moment, and the girl at last looked away.

"How did *you*?" she asked, quietly enough. She was strangely unlike any woman "bookie" he had ever before seen.

"Oh, me! I'm different!" he cried. For some subtle reason she went pale, and then flushed hot again.

"You're—you're not MacNutt's wife?" he asked her, almost hopelessly.

She moved her head from side to side, slowly, in dissent, and got up and went to the window, where she gazed out over the house-tops at the paling afternoon. "No, I'm not his wife," she said, in her quiet contralto.

"Then why won't you tell me how you got mixed up in this sort of thing?"

"It's all so silly and commonplace," she said, without turning to look at him.

"Yes?" he said, and waited.

"It began two years ago, when I

answered an advertisement from London. I came to be a governess in a New York family. At the end of my first week here, my mistress suspected me unjustly of—I can't explain it all to you here; but she said I was too good-looking to be a governess, and discharged me without even a reference. I was penniless in two weeks, and, when I was almost starving, I was glad enough to become the secretary of an investment company, with an office in Wall street. The police raided the office—it turned out to be nothing but a swindling scheme; and then—oh, I don't know—I just drifted from one thing to another until I was the English heiress in a matrimonial bureau, and the stenographer in a turf bureau; and then, at last, I met MacNutt!"

"And then what?" Durkin's careless shoulders were very upright.

"Oh, first it was a women's get-rich-quick concern in Chicago; then, a turf-investment office in St. Louis; then, a matrimonial bureau of our own, until the police put a stop to it because of the post-office people; then, it was chasing the circuit for a season; and, finally, this wire-tapping plan!" She looked at him, weary-eyed, smilingly hopeless.

"I—I send home money, regularly," she went on, more quietly. "They think I'm a governess here; and I daren't let them know. So, you see, I've been nothing but cowardly—and—and wicked, from the first!"

"And is that all?" demanded Durkin.

"Yes," she answered, wearily, "I think that's all."

"But you're too—too good for all this!" he cried, impetuously. "Why don't you break away from it?"

"I'm going to, some day! I've always waited, though, and everything has dragged on and on and on, and I've been half-afraid of MacNutt—you know, he never forgives a person—and half-afraid of myself. But some day——"

"I know what it's like!" cried Durkin, drawn toward her, strangely

nearer to her in some intangible way. She read the sudden look on his face, and blushed under it, almost girlishly, once more.

"I want to rest, and be quiet, and live decently, away from the world, somewhere," she said, dreamily, as though speaking only to herself.

"So do I!" said the man at her side, gazing with her out at the gathering twilight of the city, and lapsing into silence once more.

More than once, during the feverish kaleidoscopic days that followed, Durkin found himself drawing aside to ask if, after all, he were not living some restless dream in which all things hung tenuous and insubstantial. The fine linen and luxury of life were so new to him that in itself it half-intoxicated; yet, outside the mere ventral pleasures of existence, with its good dinners in quiet cafés of gold and glass and muffling carpets, its visits to rustling, dimly-lighted theatres, its drives about the open city, its ever-mingled odors of Havana and cut-flowers—there was the keener and more penetrating happiness of listening to the soft, English voice of a bewilderingly beautiful woman. Durkin found work to be done, it is true—rigorous and exacting work, when the appointed days for holding up Penfield's despatches came around. But the danger of it all, for some reason, never entered his mind, as he sat over his instrument, reading off the horses to the woman at his side, who, in turn, repeated them over the 'phones, in cipher, to MacNutt and Mackenzie; and then, when the time-allowance had elapsed, cutting in once more and sending on the intercepted despatches, even imitating to a nicety the slipshod, erratic volubility of Corcoran's "blind send."

Only once did a disturbing incident tend to ruffle the quiet waters of Durkin's strange contentment. It was one afternoon when Mackenzie had been sent in to make a report, and had noticed certain things to which he did not take kindly, Durkin thought.

"I'm not saying anything," he blurted out, when they were alone, "but don't let that woman make a fool of you!"

"You shut up about that woman!" retorted Durkin, hotly.

"You damned lobster, you!" the other cried, with some wordless disgust on his face. "Don't you know that woman's been——?"

But here the entrance of the girl herself put a stop to his speech. Yet, troubled in spirit as that currish insinuation left him, Durkin breathed no word to the girl herself of what had taken place, imperiously as she demanded to know what Mackenzie had been saying.

On the following day, as MacNutt had arranged, the two paid their first visit to Penfield's lower house, from which Durkin carried away confused memories of a square-jawed doorkeeper—who passed him, readily enough, at a word from the girl; of well-dressed men and over-dressed women crowded about a smoky, gas-lit room, one side of which was taken up with a black-board on which attendants were feverishly chalking down entries, jockeys, weights and odds, while on the other side of the room opened the receiving- and paying-tellers' little windows, through which now and then he saw hurrying clerks; of bettors excitedly filling in slips which disappeared with their money through the mysterious pigeon-hole in the wall; of the excited comments as the announcer called the facts of the races, crying dramatically when the horses were at the post, when they were off, when one horse led, and when another; when the winner passed under the wire; of the long, wearing wait while the jockeys were weighing in, and of the posting of the official returns, while the lucky ones gathered jubilantly at the window for their money, and the unlucky dropped forlornly away, or lingered for still another plunge.

Durkin found it hard, during each of these brief visits, to get used to the new order of things. Such light-

fingered handling of what, to his eyes, seemed fortunes, unstrung and bewildered him; the loss of even a hundred dollars on a horse in some way depressed him for the day. Mame picked her winners, however, with studious and deliberate skill, and, though they bet freely, it was not often that their losses, in the end, were heavy.

It was one night after a lucky plunge on a 20-to-1 horse had brought him in an unexpected fortune of eighteen hundred dollars that Durkin, driving up Fifth avenue through the waning afternoon of the early Winter with Mame at his side, allowed his thoughts to wander back to his thin and empty existence as a Postal Union operator. As he gazed out on the carriages and the women and the lights, and felt the warmth of the girl at his side, he wondered how he had ever endured that old, colorless life.

With a sudden, impetuous motion he caught up her hand, where it lay idly in her lap, and held it close. She tried to draw it away, but could not.

"Everything seems so different, Mame, since I've known you!" he said, huskily.

"It's different with me, too!" she all but whispered, looking away. Her face, in the waning light, against the gloom of the green-lined hansom, looked pale, almost flowerlike.

"Mame!" he cried, softly, in a voice that started her breathing quickly, "Mame, won't you—won't you marry me?"

She looked at him out of what seemed frightened eyes, with a strange, half-startled light on her pale face.

"I love you, Mame, more than I can tell!" he went on, impetuously. "You could walk over me, and I'd be happy!"

"Oh, you don't know me, you don't know me!" she cried. "You don't know what I've been!" And some agony of mind seemed to wrench her whole body.

"I don't care what you've been—I know what you *are*! You're the girl I'd give my life for! Good Lord, look

at me; ain't I bad enough, myself? I love you, Mame; isn't that enough?"

She let him catch her up to his shoulder and hold her there, with her wet cheek against his; she even said nothing when he bent and kissed her on the mouth, though her very lips grew colorless.

"I do love you!" she sighed, weakly. "I do love you! I do!" and she clung to him, childishly, shaken with a sob or two, happy, yet vaguely troubled.

"Then why can't we get away from here, somewhere, and be happy?"

"There's MacNutt!" she cried, remembering, opening her drooping eyes to grim life again. "He'd—he'd—" She did not finish.

"What's he to us?" Durkin demanded. "I only wish, by heavens, I had my hands on a few of his thousands!"

The girl looked up, quickly, with the flash of some new thought shadowed on her white face.

"Why *shouldn't* we?" she cried, half bitterly. "We've gone through enough for him!"

"Yes," hesitated Durkin, "why shouldn't we?"

"Then we could go away," she was saying, dreamily, "away to England, even! I wonder if you would like England? I wonder if you would?"

"I'd like any place, where you were!"

"He's always been a welcher with the people he uses. He'll be a welcher with us!"

She turned to Durkin with a sudden determination. "Would you risk it, with me?"

"I'd risk anything for you!" he said, taking her hand once more.

"We've a right to our happiness," she argued, passionately. "We've our life—all our life, almost—before us! And I've loved you, Jim," she confessed, toying with a button on his sleeve, "from that first day MacNutt brought you up!"

For all the calm precision with which Mabel Candler had planned out a line of prompt action with Durkin, she was shaking and nervous and unstrung as

she leaned over the sounder, breathlessly waiting for the rest of the day's returns to come through on Penfield's wire.

Durkin, with two thousand dollars of his own and an additional eight hundred from her, had already plunged his limit at Penfield's lower house, on the strength of her tip over the 'phone. There was still to be one final hazard, with all he held; and at five o'clock they were to meet at Hartley's restaurant, and from there escape to a new world of freedom and contentment. But the fear of MacNutt still hung over her, as she waited—fear for certain other things besides their secret revolt on the very eve of their chief's gigantic coup. For she knew what MacNutt could be when he was crossed. So, she leaned and waited and listened with parted lips, wishing it was all over with, torn by a thousand fears.

Then, to her sudden terror, Mackenzie called her up sharply.

"Is that you, Mame?" he cried, excitedly.

"Yes; what is it, Mack?" she answered, calmly enough, but with quaking knees.

"Doogan's men are watching me here—they've got onto something or other. Cut this wire loose from outside, and get your 'phone out of sight. And, for heaven's sake, don't cut in on Penfield's wire. I've just tipped off MacNutt—he's off his dip, about it all. Look out for yourself, old girl!" he added, in a different tone of voice.

She rang off, and vowed passionately within herself that she would look out for herself. Catching up a pair of pliers, she cut the telephone wire from the open window, leaving two hundred feet of it to dangle over the little back house-courts. Then, she ran to the door and locked and bolted it, listening all the while for the wire to speak out to her.

A minute later, MacNutt himself rang up, and asked for Durkin.

"What're you doing there?" he demanded, with a startled oath, as he heard her voice. She tried to stammer out an excuse. There was a mo-

ment's pause; the man all but hissed one ugly word over the wire to the listening woman. Mackenzie had been hinting to him of certain things; now, he knew.

He did not wait even to replace his receiver. While she still stood there, white and dazed, he was in a hansom, rattling and swaying nearer her, block by block. He let himself in with his own pass-key, and raced up the long stair, his face drawn, and a dull, claret tinge. He found the door closed and bolted; he could hear nothing from within but the muffled clicking of the sounder as it ticked out the later New Orleans returns. No answer came to his knocking. He seized an old-fashioned walnut arm-chair from the next room, and forced it with all his weight against the oak panels. They splintered and broke, and, under the second blow, fell in, leaving only the heavier cross-pieces intact.

Quite motionless, waiting over the sounder, bent the woman, as though she had neither seen nor heard. "White Legs—Yukon Girl—Lord Selwyn," those alone were the words which the clicking brass seemed to brand on her very brain. In three seconds, she stood before the telephone, at the other end of which she knew Durkin to be waiting. But she saw the flash of something in the hand of the man who leaned through the broken panel, and paused, motionless, with a little, inarticulate cry.

"Touch that 'phone, you welcher, and I'll plug you!" the man was screaming at her. His face was now bluish purple, and horrible to look at.

"I've got to do it, Mack!" she pleaded, raising one hand to her face.

He called her many foul names, and deliberately trained his pistol on her breast.

"Mack, you wouldn't shoot *me*, after—after everything? Oh, Mack, I've got to send this through! I've got to!" she wailed.

"Stop!" he gasped; and she knew there was no hope.

"You wouldn't shoot me, Mack?" she whined again, with the cunning of

the cornered animal; for, even as she spoke, the hand that hovered about her face shot out and caught up the receiver. Her other hand flashed to the bell-lever, and the sharp tinkle of the bell rang through the room. Her eyes were on MacNutt; she saw the finger compress on the trigger, even as her hand first went up.

"Jim!" she called, sharply, with an agony of despair in that one quick word. She repeated the call, but a reverberation that shook shreds of plaster from the ceiling drowned her voice. The receiver fell, and swung at full length. The smoke lifted slowly, curling softly toward the open window.

MacNutt gazed, stupefied, at the huddled figure on the floor. How long he looked he scarcely knew, but he was startled from his stupor by the sound of blows on the street-door. Flinging his revolver into the room, he stumbled down the heavily carpeted stairs, slunk out a back door, and, sprawling over the court-fence, fell into a yard strewn with empty boxes. Seeing a near-by door, he opened it, and found himself in a noisy auction-room filled with bidders. Pushing hurriedly through them, he stepped out into the street, unnoticed.

When the wounded woman had made sure that she was alone—she had been afraid to move where she lay, fearing a second shot—with a little groan or two she tried to rise to her knees. But this, she found, was beyond her strength. The left sleeve of her waist, she also saw, was wet and sodden with blood. Already, she could hear footsteps below, and again and again she told herself that she must be ready when Durkin came, that he, at least, must not be trapped. She, as a mere pool-room stenographer, had little to fear from the law. But as she tried, with her teeth and her free arm, to tear a strip from her white underskirt, the movement, for all her tight-lipped determination, was too much for her. She had a faint memory of hearing footsteps swarming about her, and then of ebbing and pulsing down

through endless depths of what seemed to her eider-downed emptiness.

When she came to, one of Doogan's men was leaning over her, with a pocket-flask of brandy in his hand. She looked at him, bewildered, and from him to the other four men who stood about her; and then it all came back to her.

She closed her eyes again, vaguely wondering if some teasing, indeterminate mishap, which she could not quite remember, had yet come about. At first, she could not grasp it, as she lay there moaning with pain; and then it, too, came to her, in a flash. It was Durkin. He was coming back; and they were waiting there, waiting to trap him. Again, she told herself that she must keep her head, and be cool. She looked at the five men in the room; three of them, she knew, were plain-clothes men from the Central Office, the other two were Doogan's agents. If Durkin came while they were still there—and now he *could* not be long!—they would let him in, and say nothing, and there they would have him, like a rat in a trap.

She grew hysterical, and cried out to them that she was dying, yet, waiting all the time for the sound of Durkin's step, trying to think how she might save him. At last, to her sudden joy, she remembered that he was to bring from her rooms with him her own hand-bag, filled with a few things which she had gathered up to take away with her. He would surely carry that bag in with him when he came; that was her salvation.

She fell to shrieking again that she was dying, demanding shrilly why her doctor had not come. Through her cries, her alert ears heard the sound of voices at the street-door. It was Durkin, at last; he had spoken a word or two with the two plain-clothes men, who, she knew, would readily enough let him pass.

"Doctor!" she screamed, as she heard his steps on the stair. "Doctor! I'm dying, doctor! Are you never coming?"

She wondered, in her agony, if he

would be fool enough not to understand. *Would* he be fool enough?

Doogan's agents and the three plain-clothes men gathered about her silently, as they saw the intruder hurry in and drop on his knee beside the woman. "Is it you, doctor?" she wailed, shaking with an on-coming chill.

Durkin, in his dilemma, did not dare to look away from her face. He was blindly trying to grope his way toward what it all meant. The others stood above him, listening, waiting for the least word.

He bent lower, and tried to read the dumb agony in the woman's face. Then, out of the chaos and the disorder of the chattering of her teeth seemed to come a hint, a whisper. She was sounding the double "I" of the operator—she was trying to tell him something. He bent still closer, and fumbled artfully with the sleeve, wet and sodden with her warm blood.

He read her signal, as she lay there with chattering teeth: "All up! Get away, quick! These are police! Meet you in London—two months—Hotel Cecil—hurry!"

He looked up at the men above him, with a sudden towering, drunken mad-

ness of relief, a madness which they took for sudden rage.

"You fools, you," he called at them, "you fools, this woman's dying! Here, you, quick—compress this artery with your thumb—hard, so! You, you—oh, I don't care *who* you are—telephone for my instruments—Dr. Hodgson, No. 29 West Thirtieth!"—luckily, he remembered Mame's throat doctor—"and get me a sheet off one of the beds, quick!"

He tossed his hat into the hall, and jerked off his cuffs, almost believing in it himself.

"Water—where'll I get a water-tap?" he asked, feverishly, running to the door. Outside the room, he suddenly caught up his hat. Then, he turned and bolted noiselessly up a pair of back stairs, and gained the roof. There he crept, cat-like, across half-a-dozen houses, slipped down a fire escape, and gave a startled Irish housemaid a five-dollar bill to let him pass through her mistress's apartment.

As he turned hurriedly into Madison avenue, toward the Grand Central station, he heard the clang of a bell, and saw an ambulance clatter down the street. And then he repeated something in his mind, to make sure of it: "London—two months—Hotel Cecil."



A SOUTHERN BALCONY

IN the soft glow and glamour of the night
 I heard the sound of music down the street—
 A girl's voice singing some old ballad sweet,
 A song of love and all of love's delight.
 Above me hung the moon's great blossom bright,
 And swarms of stars like bees came forth to greet
 This bloom of wonder in its blue retreat—
 This world-flower with a bosom lily white.

Within the plaza, drowsily the purl
 Of fountains fell upon the fragrant air,
 And I, aweary of the long, hot day,
 Slumbered and dreamed; and still that singing girl
 Sang in her balcony—and I was there
 With you, sweetheart, a thousand miles away!

FRANK DEMPSTER SHERMAN.

THE MORAL BALLAD OF GAMALIEL LADD AND HIS GIDDY BRIDE

By Guy Wetmore Carryl

GAMALIEL LADD might have gone to the bad (as most of his family did),
Except for one bias, for, earnestly try as he would, he could never get
rid
Of a perfectly puerile affection for rural and pleasingly pastoral life,
Where you go round in braces to all kinds of places, and eat lima beans with a
knife.
He really felt pity for men in the city, bound down unto rigid routines,
And fated to talk and to eat and to walk as if they'd been merely machines;
Such life was so stale to this singular male that he always was longing to have
a new,
"Which is not to be found," he asserted, "around that tiresome highway, Fifth
avenue."

When they asked him to dine, when they offered him wine, he said to the men
at his club:
"I wouldn't touch sole with a thirty-foot pole, and *my* tipple is raspberry shrub.
For boys and for bounders are Frenchified flounders, and truffles and terrapin,
too—
I'd rather eat cat-fish than second rate flat-fish, and leather belongs in a shoe."
At each *table d'hôte* meal he pined for the oatmeal, the doughnuts and blueberry
tart,
Which they gave him to eat in the rural retreat which was dear to his innocent
heart;
Till he packed up his grip, gave his comrades the slip, and the N. Y., N. H.
and H. on
Escaped to the quiet and common-sense diet of North Rusticalbury, Conn.

The more he commuted, the more deeply rooted his love of the rural became;
He wore the blue jeans of those pastoral scenes with never a symptom of shame;
He followed the plough, and went after the cow, and learned to cut grass with
a scythe,
And his highly oracular country vernacular made his acquaintances writhe.
He confided to some that the moment had come when romance had entered his
life,
That the girl wasn't swell, but meant awfully well, and would make him an
excellent wife.
He plucked up the nerve to boldly observe that he *liked* the name, Emily Pearl;
And he wed in October, while helplessly sober, a North Rusticalbury girl.

The couple came down for a fortnight in town, and, when with his wonted
placidity
The hotels he called off, she picked out the Waldorf, and that's what *he* got for
stupidity.

"But, tell me, my love, when you've had enough of metropolitan gaiety," said he.

She gave a bright smile, and she answered him: "I'll be certain to stop when I'm ready."

She determined each day, in a casual way, to dally around and to see things, And, now and again, to invite a few men to drop in and rattle the tea-things. It was proved in a jiffy to hubby that, if he of giddy New York wasn't fond, His beautiful wife took a shine to the life like a duck to a neighboring pond!

Then the cronies of Ladd went totally mad over Emily Pearl, and would seize 'Most any evasion which gave them occasion to come to her capital teas.

They dropped in in bunches for dinners and lunches, they sat around chatting for hours,

They told her their woes and the price of their clothes, and squandered their money on flowers.

Her particular kind is quite easy to find; you will know it at once, I suppose, When I add that her game was a fellow's first name, and her fan on the floor when she rose.

She said with a sigh that her youth had gone by, she hinted at sorrows so sadly That her swains in a squad lay down on the sod, and let her walk over them gladly.

Each day a new bonnet, with humming-birds on it, she showed to the stupefied Ladd;

She'd buy a fresh toilette, and wear it, and spoil it, and smile when she should have been sad;

She rented a brougham, and a trim little groom, and nightly she went to the opera;

And, though a beginner, she loved to take dinner at Sherry's (or somewhere improper!).

She was no light-weight, *she* had to have whitebait, and pâté, and chicken ragoût;

She thought, on the whole, she rather liked sole, and truffles and terrapin, too.

She was no beer-steiner, *she* ordered Niersteiner, burgundy, Pommery *sec*, And sipped Russian kummel, while Ladd murmured "Himmel!" when Anatole brought him the check.

Gamaliel Ladd a sufficiency had of this while the game was yet young; He turned rather pale, and gnawed at his nail, and he moistened his lip with his tongue;

Then he said to his wife, "I must tell you, my life, this conviction my cranium fills:

There are too many Larries, and Johnnies, and Harries, and oh, there are too many Bills!

It's time it should cease; so, pack your valise, and our traveling togs we will don, And hop on a train, and return once again to North Rusticalbury, Conn."

It would fill me with pain did I have to explain what the giddy young creature replied;

'Twas the swift line of talk that is heard in New York when a man tries to bully his bride.

THE MORAL is somewhat immoral: She's still giving capital teas; The club-world is winking a cynical eye; Ladd's minding his q's and his p's. Take the capital T, and the cynical I, and the curious P as well, And you won't make a fool of yourself if at school you learned the short word that they spell!

AN INVITATION TO LUNCHEON

By Margaret Johnson

“A PERFECT match, my dear —you couldn’t do better. And you are certainly fortunate to find a blue that will go with that crêpe; blues are so difficult, I think. But Harrison would have it, if any one. Lovely store, isn’t it? Why, do you realize that it is nearly one o’clock? Shopping does make the time fly so! I had no idea— Now, you must come and have some luncheon with me! Yes, positively—don’t say a word—it will be the greatest pleasure! Then, we can *talk*. It is simply impossible to say a word in these stores; besides, I’m hungry, aren’t you? Yes, and you’re not in a hurry? That will be perfectly lovely! How delightful that I met you!

“Where shall we go? Oh, anywhere you like. I *would* say Scarey’s or the Calledoff—would that suit you—only—one does like, you know—I haven’t got on— You haven’t, either? Well, that’s all right, then! And I guess we shall enjoy it just as much if we aren’t *too* stylish! What do you say to Furswell’s? Rather out of our way, isn’t it? And then, I don’t know that I care especially—you do get tired of a place if you go very often, don’t you think? There’s Huyllard’s—don’t you like Huyllard’s? Oh, is it? How perfectly lovely! If a person *has* a favorite place, I always think it’s so nice; and it doesn’t make a bit of difference to me.

“Walk, sha’n’t we? Yes, so would I. Maud—my cousin, Maud Morris, you know—had the funniest experience at Huyllard’s the other day. She was luncheon there with a friend, and they had just ordered their chocolate—odd,

isn’t it, how you always feel as if you must have chocolate at Huyllard’s? And, after all, I don’t know that I think their chocolate *is*—there’s so much in a name, you know. It’s quite absurd, sometimes; but, after a place once gets a reputation—

“Did you ever try Matson’s? Oh, yes, the dearest little place! Not so swell, you know, but real cozy and pleasant, and ridiculously reasonable! And the things are every bit as good, I think! I don’t see any sense in paying fancy prices just for the sake of it, do you? Some people are so—well, *let’s*, if you say so. It will be new to you, anyway, and I think a new place is always fun, don’t you?

“Oh, no; not far—only two or three blocks. Aren’t you glad they’re going to wear so much lace this season? Expensive, of course, but then, I always did love those soft, droopy things. Yes, aren’t they? I should like to get Reggie a suit like that one in the window; isn’t it dear! Oh, yes, I cut his hair that way last Spring. It’s a perfectly sweet way for little boys, I think. My husband laughs at me because I say I don’t see anything nice about the Russians except the way they cut their little boys’ hair. At least, I suppose they cut it so, don’t you? or else, why should we—?

“Why, do you know we’ve passed Matson’s? We *must* have—we were talking so fast, and I never noticed. I’m not sure—oh, well, it’s no use going back now. It’s getting so late, and you might not have liked it, anyway. We might run in to the Sienna Cakery, now that we have come down so far. That’s always good; and their coffee,

you know! I tell my husband that really, after all, a cup of coffee and a roll is all I want at noon, when I am out shopping. If you have a late breakfast and then a hearty meal in the middle of the day, you don't have a chance to get hungry for dinner. I often tell him I don't see how he can—Well, shall we? All right; *I'd* like it just as well, and it takes so much less time!

"Oh, if you don't mind, I do want to run in and ask about a filter at John-awaker's. Do you use a stone filter? Yes, it won't take a minute. Oh, have you an errand, too? How lovely! We might as well, so long as we are right here—and then we can come back and enjoy our luncheon with a clear conscience. Yes, I know; some people always do. Maud does—she won't have a drop on her table that isn't boiled. But my husband says he doesn't care about boiled germs; he'd rather take his raw, so long as he's got to have them, anyhow. Absurd, isn't it? He is so ridiculous, sometimes!

"Yes, they have hot chocolate at the soda-fountain. Quite an idea, isn't

it! And they give you two little crackers with it in a saucer—so cute! Maud took some the other day, and she said it was just as good as you'd care to have. I laughed at her, but I thought, after all, perhaps I'd try it some day. No, you don't mean it! Would you, *really*? It seems so funny, doesn't it? But *I* don't care, and it's getting so late, too! I promised to be home early. Oh, *did* you? Well, if you say so, perhaps we may as well.

"Yes, you buy your checks at the desk, just like soda-water. Oh, you must let me! Seriously, I *insist*! Why—why, did you ever—isn't it too absurd! I haven't anything but a ten-dollar bill! Wait a minute. No, I really haven't! How perfectly provoking! What? Have you, truly? Well, if you don't mind—it does seem too bad to change a bill just for that! If you *will*—thank you, ever so much; and don't forget to remind me the very first time I see you again!

"Right over there at the counter. Yes, isn't it? We must lunch together again some day. Good-bye! My love to the children. So *glad* I met you! Good-bye!"



CHOPIN'S ANDANTE IN F MINOR

BUT, if I follow through a world of snow
The trailing skirts of storm by land and sea,
All the long path appointed me to go,
Shall I not come to thee?

But, if I dare to toil by night and day,
The thirst and thorns of many a desert place,
The ambushed brake of foes beside my way,
Shall I not find thy face?

But, if I break the bonds of shroud and clod,
When the last trump shall wake the souls of men,
Claiming thy kiss beyond the gates of God—
Wilt thou not love me, then?

MABEL EARLE.

THE NEXT TABLE

By Theodosia Garrison

SHE wondered why the fact of her deciding to marry the man had made him so suddenly obnoxious. Yesterday, no doubt, his figure had been as rotund, his eyes as small and deeply placed, his head as bald, and his jewels as obtrusive as they showed now when the city lights flashed by their hansom.

There was a jewel of his on her own finger. She pressed it rather sharply into her flesh as she listened. It helped her to keep her mind on the subject at hand—a subject which any man might reasonably assume to be of paramount importance to his fiancée. He was speaking of himself in the commending tone with which one patronizes and approves a stranger. She caught, listlessly, at the end of his story.

"And, when I make up my mind to do a thing, I take care not to be disappointed. I spent the last penny I had in the world there, and for a mighty poor dinner, too. You wouldn't think it was a place to be fond of, under the circumstances, eh? Well, I ain't, but that night, when I put my last dime down for the waiter, I said to myself, 'Roden, you go out of this place broke, but the next time you come, you'll have your pile, and you can buy the whole damned thing, from the bar to the cook, if you feel like it!' Well, it's a queer thing, perhaps, but I kept the thought in the back of my head, and when the shekels began to roll in, I brought it out again. That's why we're going here to-night. You mustn't kick if it isn't up to Sherry's."

"But you might have come before,"

she said. "Surely, your—your money— isn't a thing of to-day."

He laughed, unctuously, laying his heavy hand on her own.

"No, but you are. I waited to go the whole figure, and I guess I have. You're the top mark; you represent what the whole thing means—I waited for you."

"It's rather far down-town," she said. The remark, she felt, was wholly inappropriate, but it was, at least, speech, and it postponed the caress which she felt was imminent.

"We're here now," he said. "It's well after eight. We'll have the place to ourselves, I imagine."

She waited, while he overpaid the cabby ostentatiously, and they went up the long steps.

The restaurant, like many others in the neighborhood, had been made by converting a one-time private house to its needs. There was nothing in the sight of the stout and beaming cashier at the high desk in the narrow hall that struck her as familiar, but at the threshold of the dining-room she stopped, with a sudden, choked exclamation.

That wall-paper with its ridiculous frieze of blue, and titanic roses—the stuffed owl on the mantel—the grotesque oil-painting over the very table to which the solitary waiter was leading them! She recognized them with a thoroughness that sent the color from her cheeks.

She laid an impulsive hand on Roden's arm. "Oh, not *this* place, surely!" she said.

The man laughed. "Pretty cheap, eh?" he said. "But you can stand it

for once. We'll make up for it to-morrow night."

The waiter pulled the chairs from the table beneath the absurd painting, and smiled at them, benevolently.

The girl's fingers tightened on Roden's arm. "Take the next table," she insisted.

She seated herself with her back to the one the waiter had designated before she smiled her explanation at Roden.

"That wall-paper would put my eyes out if I stared at it too long. I would rather face the window, if you don't mind. I don't want to go about with blue roses on my nerves for the rest of my life."

She kept the smile on her lips as Roden consulted the soiled menu and impressed the waiter with the munificence of his order. Roden answered the smile, approvingly.

"I guess the waiter had the shock of his life just now," he said. "The last time I was here, I had liver and bacon, and washed it down with water. Well"—he threw a glance about at the empty room—"it is later than I thought. We've got the place to ourselves, at any rate. It's about the first time I've had you alone since—" He nodded significantly at the ring on her finger.

"Yes," she said, "we have it quite to ourselves." But, as she spoke, the consciousness of the two people at the table behind her was so real that she almost wondered why Roden, facing them, seemed blind to their existence.

She had seen them the moment she hesitated at the threshold. Had they been always sitting there, she thought, since that May night last year, always looking at each other with the same eyes, with hands that crept always a little nearer to one another across the cloth? She could hear their voices plainly—the man's low voice, with its fascinating Southern drawl; the girl's happy, young laugh, with its wonderful note of tenderness. Had she really laughed like that once? she wondered. It seemed strange now that any woman could.

"No," the man was saying, "I am

quite right about your eyes; and, if I have put them in a story, it is no more than you deserve for daring to have them. Think of all the stories I am going to find there—always!"

The waiter filled the glass at her elbow. She realized that Roden was addressing her. He lifted his glass, the stones on his stout fingers reflected in its contents.

"Here's to luck," he said; "something we both can appreciate, eh? I should say we were both pretty successful people. It isn't every day that a man can make his pile, or a woman marry it. It isn't every woman I'd want to have spend it for me, either. The Lord knows it wouldn't be hard to find plenty to help me, but I'm a bit particular. I wanted a thoroughbred—one that could act as though she was used to it. Why, the first time I set eyes on you—"

"You'll be the prettiest pauper in the world, and I'll be the happiest," said the low voice behind her, "and, if you ever get tired of going up four flights of stairs, I'll carry you. Oh, sweetheart, to think it will be our home—ours!—waiting for us at the top of them; and, if I ever have to leave you for an hour—if I *have* to—think of my coming back to find you there! Just you and me, with the doors closed and the rest of the world shut out."

"Why, the first time I set eyes on you," Roden repeated, "I said to myself, 'There's the one for me—there's the sort of a woman to do a man credit, at home or abroad.' And, speaking of that, I suppose you'll want to travel—all women do. We'll take a little run across the pond this Summer, if you like, after we get our house settled here. I saw Davidson about the plans to-day. I guess he thought the price would stagger me. 'Hang the expense!' I said to him. 'A man isn't married every day, and I want to put my wife in a house that will make people open their eyes.'"

"Yes," she said, vaguely. She was listening to that other voice, as the girl behind her had listened a year ago.

"And every time a story is sold," it said, "we'll have a new honeymoon trip—a long, lazy holiday with a lunch in some strange, little corner downtown that we have discovered ourselves, and a browse in queer streets and shops afterward; and, if anything is left, which isn't likely, we'll come home in a hansom. There never was such a jolly little comrade as you are; but, when we get home and talk it over, you'll be something even better than that—just the *sweetest* woman, the——"

"What's the matter?" asked the man opposite. "You're not eating anything. Here, try this. You mustn't get thin and go off your looks before the great day. I expect my wife to do me credit."

She shrank a moment from the look in his eyes before she recognized it. She had seen it turned on a great many things before—on his houses, his horses, his jewels, never fully on herself. She felt the humiliation of that glance of possession tingle through her nerves, but she answered lightly.

The voice at the table behind her fell in with her own.

"And to think it will always be like this," it said. "No matter how time goes by, you will always be you. Why, any change the years might give you would be only as though you had put on a new gown to make me love you a little bit better. The real you could never change; not from age, not from grief, not from anything in the world."

Their hands had met across the table now, she knew. Was there ever a hand in the world that had been so strong, so infinitely tender, as the one that touched that other girl's at the table there? She started as Roden's hand fell a trifle heavily on her own.

"I shouldn't call you the best company in the world to-night," he said. "It's a little early in the day for us to bore each other, I should think. I thought that most girls spent their lives trying to be entertaining. I never had any of them dull around me, at any rate." He laughed jocosely, with an attempt to veil his annoy-

ance. "Lord, as far as talk is concerned, I might as well have taken your aunt out. The old lady's a corker—when the conversation gets down to dollars and cents, at any rate. Well, she's a friend of mine, all right. Here's to her!"

He lifted his wine-glass. He had taken too much already, the girl thought. The blur of it was in his voice. There seemed a reckless set to his coarse features. It seemed as though her shame at the situation had gradually revealed the man as he was, primeval, brutal, an unclean braggart, a thing from which gentlemen would guard one. Her sudden sense of helplessness frightened her.

"And to take care of you always," said the voice behind her, "that is the most exquisite privilege of all—to have strength enough to shelter you from the big things and little things. It maddens me now, sometimes, to think what you are bearing for me; but, sweetheart, I shall spend my life in making it up to you. Don't let them frighten you; and when they say 'Poverty!' to you, say 'Love!' to yourself. And in a little while——"

"You'll lose that ring if you keep poking it up and down your finger like that," said Roden. "And a stone of that sort"—he pointed to it with the cigar in his thick fingers—"ain't to be picked up every day. I shouldn't be any too well pleased if you lost it, nor you, either, I guess. Lord, I've known women to give their souls for less than that."

He blew a ring of smoke in the air, and laughed, coarsely.

"After all, you're all alike, you women. Give a woman trinkets enough, and she'll be true to you, I've always said. It's the only kind of a rope you can hold 'em with. About right, too. Why, I remember now——"

"And as for doubting you," the voice behind her said, "it would be as impossible for me to doubt my own existence. No matter what happened, if every proof in the world were brought to me, I should *know* you were

true. You *couldn't* be anything else. You might be forced into doing a thing, I might hear that I was never even to look at you again, but I should know it was none of your doing. And whatever happens, dearest, you must remember that I am always thinking that—always."

The man opposite was scowling unpleasantly.

"Be a bit careful of that ring, can't you?" he said. "There, you've got it off altogether, now!"

"If it's ten years or twenty years," said the other voice, "no matter where or how far I might be, a word from you would bring me. I think, if you needed me, I could come back from the dead. Promise me that you will always remember that. But, as if you needed to promise! And, besides, I want you to tell me something else now—that always, and always——"

The girl brought her eyes back to Roden with a start.

"Yes," she said, with the realization that he had spoken, "you were saying——?"

"I was saying that it's about time we got out of this," he repeated. "What's the matter with you, anyway? I'm getting tired of saying a thing three times before you hear it. Here, you," he turned to the waiter, "get my coat. Put on your ring, and come on."

There was the snap of authority in his voice, the curl of it on his thick lips. The girl hesitated a moment. The stone of the ring she held in her open palm stared at her like a red, unwinking eye—hard, cold, bloodless—and

precious. She looked at it, lingeringly. There was a strange fascination in its depths.

"Well, come on," Roden snarled.

"Sweetheart!" said the low voice behind her; "sweetheart!"

The girl lifted her face, a face illumined, one that the man at her side had never before seen. She wore the look of one who, after helpless grasping in the dark, had come suddenly into the light, and knew the open path before her.

He resented, without comprehending, the expression with which she regarded him, the look which swept him from head to foot, and judged and condemned and derided.

"You had better take this," she said, slowly.

She handed the ring to Roden. The look of amazed consternation on his face, as he mechanically closed his fingers about the bauble, deepened at her smile.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "Eh!"

"I will tell you as we go up-town," she said.

The untidy waiter held the portières at the narrow door obsequiously aside. He wondered why the pretty young woman, who had apparently angered her stout escort to the verge of apoplexy, should stop at the threshold to look back at an empty table. He could not know, being mere man and unimaginative, the wonderful promise of her eyes; still less that the tawdry room she left was a holy spot, wherein Love had called from his high places, and heard the answer of his faithful.



THE GREATER NEED

INQUISITIVE INDIVIDUAL—I understand, doctor, that you have discovered a radical cure for St. Vitus's dance?

EMINENT ESCULAPIAN—Yes, sir! And, with all modesty, I may say that it is the achievement of the age, a long-sought boon, which——

INQUISITIVE INDIVIDUAL—Er—h'm! Just so; but, look here—is it a remedy for the cake-walk, too?

A MEMBER OF THE HAUTE PÉGRE

By Prince Vladimir Vaniatsky

LOUIS, that estimable *maître d'hôtel*, came eagerly forward as I stepped into the almost deserted Maison Dorée. Louis took me to my usual table, straightened the already scrupulously straight cloth, and bent low over me.

"Monsieur le comte has been long away," he said, in a tone in which a certain deference and a certain friendliness were mingled.

"But I always come back to Paris," I declared, smiling, "and, once in Paris, to the Maison Dorée, and—to Louis."

Louis smiled, enigmatically.

"Monsieur's dinner is waiting for him," he said.

"How is that?" I asked.

"A gentleman called here this afternoon—a gentleman *très distingué*, with a ribbon of the Legion, monsieur—and ordered a dinner for two. It is a most excellent dinner. Then, he bade me have it ready at just this hour, saying that it would be served for you, and that he would appear at the precise moment the consommé is served."

"Quite interesting," I murmured; "but will you tell me what he has ordered for dinner?"

"The gentleman did not order," Louis explained; "he bade me prepare such a dinner as would please you. Therefore, it is made up of your favorite dishes. There is Consommé Autrichien, Turbot Casimir——"

"Enough!" I cried; "it is quite the dinner I would have ordered."

Just as the consommé was served, a tall man, irreproachably clad, came down the room under Louis's guidance.

"Good evening, monsieur le comte,"

the man said, and seated himself opposite me.

"Good evening, monsieur," I replied, looking sharply at him. He was not a handsome man, this dinner companion of mine, but he possessed an interesting appearance. He was thoroughly cosmopolitan. Not a gesture, not a feature, recalled any race or any country. He was the world's man.

When we were quite deserted, the man drew a card from his waistcoat-pocket and handed it to me. I read the name, a simple one, very carefully. Then, I noticed that it bore, in the upper, left-hand corner, a tiny fleck of black, as though a triangular spot of ink had fallen on the card.

"You are very welcome, Monsieur de Villemessant," I said. "You are well recommended."

"It is so," he returned, smiling. Then, across the dinner-table, he bandied a light conversation with me—one that showed a perfect familiarity with the world, with people, with myself, even. He was clever, clever as few men are in these days, and his tongue seemed barbed with brilliancy. A perfect dinner; wines, such as were to be found only in the cellars of the Maison Dorée, and a good companion—what more perfect evening could a man wish?

I am, I may say, a man of the world—I have encountered it in many phases in the fifty years which comprise my existence. The name of Count Pierre de Deux Ponts is not unknown. Indeed, I flatter myself that it is quite the contrary. Do I walk down the boulevards, I hear whispers pass about me.

If I appear at the Opéra, at the Théâtre Français, or even at Antoine's, I see heads turned as people point me out. I have been called the last of the boulevardiers. But there is always a "last of the boulevardiers," though few have been as persistently the last as I.

We had taken our coffee and liqueurs, pausing to light our Havanas, such only as the blessed may smoke. Then, M. de Villemessant and I rose together.

"If monsieur will honor me by coming to my apartments," I ventured, "we may talk in peace and quiet, concerning the errand on which monsieur has, doubtless, come."

He bowed gravely, in confirmation of my invitation. Together, we passed through the glass doors to the rue Lafitte, preferring that exit to the more prominent one, on the brilliantly lighted Boulevard des Italiens.

We had scarcely paused a minute on the pavement, when a fiacre drew up to the curb. I glanced at the man on the box.

"Well met, Jean Cambon," I said, and gave him a pleasant nod.

"Ah, it is monsieur le comte, back again!" cried Jean; and he twirled his whip through the air, and, with a quick twist of the reins, turned his horse into a prancing animal.

"The rue de la Barouillière, Jean," I said, as we stepped into the fiacre.

"You are, indeed, well known," declared M. de Villemessant, as he drew a fragrant whiff of his cigar.

"I have been absent from Paris four years, monsieur," I said, simply; "yet, I find I am not forgotten. Good Sainte G  n  vi  ve has every Parisian under her patronage, you must remember, monsieur."

He laughed, shortly, as though asking why such a notorious man as Pierre de Deux Ponts should believe in the patronage of Sainte G  n  vi  ve.

"Come, come, monsieur," I cried; "why should I not believe in Sainte G  n  vi  ve? You, doubtless, believe that it is good luck to gamble with borrowed money, and have given a louis to a hunchback, to let you rub his

hunch, before you enter into the salles at Monte Carlo."

"Ah, it is so, monsieur le comte, it is so. I was wrong to laugh."

When the good Jean brought us before the door of the house on the rue de la Barouill  re, where I have kept an apartment for many years, I gave him a liberal *douceur*. It is good to feel in one's absence that one is not forgotten.

When M. de Villemessant entered the drawing-room of my apartment, he paused for a moment on the threshold. Then, I laughed.

"Enter, Count of Raday!" I cried. He turned, and looked at me in great surprise. But he stepped into the room, furnished with odd things, and hung with paintings and tapestries which I have picked up in the four quarters of the globe. A great Japanese lantern of bronze, which hung from the centre of the room, gave the only light. But I touched a button at the door, and the silver sconces and the big candelabra from Versailles sprang into a white glow.

Imhof, my man, stepped into the room, and wheeled two big chairs and a low table before the fireplace. He bent over the hearth, and, in a minute, a fire of crackling, resinous logs perfumed the room with the healthy odor of burning wood. Then, Imhof brought a cabinet and placed it on the table, throwing back the polished cover to disclose a number of bottles and tiny glasses. Still another cabinet was brought, and the lid disclosed long, moist cigars, as fresh as when they left the maker's hands in far-off Havana.

"The Count of Raday will please himself," I said, as Imhof paused.

"Let it be absinthe, then, monsieur," the count replied. In a second, Imhof had prepared the glass, with the water dripping down into the translucent green of the depths.

"Monsieur de Raday seemed surprised that I should know his name," I said, "but he should not be. It is my business to know every one. Monsieur de Raday and I have played, side by side, in the salles at Monte

Carlo; we have been within a foot-step of each other on the Ringstrasse, in Vienna; we have witnessed the performance at the Acacias, within three feet of each other; we have traveled in the same compartment of the Rapide from Paris to Nice. On the last occasion, Monsieur de Raday even played cards with me. Yet, he does not think I remember him."

"Just heaven, monsieur le comte," cried he, "you are a most interesting man."

"No, monsieur," I replied, "I am an interested man. The two are quite different."

Imhof discreetly withdrew from the room, and I was left quite alone with Count de Raday, a member of the Imperial Household of the Emperor-King of Austria-Hungary.

"Monsieur de Raday may be interested in my collection of Bartolozzi engravings," I suggested, "or, if his taste runs that way, I have a few very interesting little bits of work by Albrecht Dürer."

"I must confess, monsieur," Count Raday answered, "that I am not a connoisseur in art."

"Ah?" I responded. "Then you have come to see me on business," I intimated, "or the mark of Imre is wrong."

"It is so, sir," he answered.

"Good!" I cried. "But I must warn you that the business must be——"

"Ah, it is, monsieur le comte, it is. It is a strange request which I have to make of you. Yet, when I make it, you must remember that I represent, not the Count of Raday, but the Archduke Maximilian-Otto, and, through him, his Majesty, Franz Josef." I bowed at the mention of the distinguished names. "Monsieur le comte," he continued, brushing a bit of dust from his coat, "there is a package of letters belonging to the archduke, which have, in some way, become lost to view. It is unknown whether they are lost or not. Yet, those papers cannot be found. I may say, frankly, monsieur, that they

affect one of the most serious issues in Austria to-day, being connected with the right of succession to the Hungarian throne. Should those papers fall into the hands of a certain faction, they would be held in reserve until the death of his Apostolic Majesty. Then, if nothing occurs to prevent, and the faction, to which I refer, could act unhampered, the result would be the division of the dual kingdom, and the establishment of the Kingdom of Hungary, as a separate state, instead of a coalescent state of Austria."

"And, further," I suggested, "if those papers should fall into the hands of the faction to which you have referred, they would be used in placing upon the Hungarian throne a youth whose weak mental powers and whose vicious excesses would make him the tool of some one powerful man."

"Monsieur le comte is then familiar with Austrian politics?"

"In a superficial manner," I made answer.

"Then, perhaps, monsieur le comte, you will lend the archduke your aid in his efforts to regain these most important papers? The archduke throws himself completely upon your mercy. To be perfectly candid, monsieur, the Emperor-King is not aware that those papers are other than in their proper place."

"I am unaware, Count de Raday," I replied, coldly, "of how I can help the archduke. I am not a detective; nor do I know in what manner I might be of service to the archduke. If I could, I would gladly help him. As it is, I am powerless."

Count Raday turned nervously in his chair, taking a long drink of his absinthe.

"Monsieur le comte, it has been suggested," he replied, with emphasis upon the last word, "that, through your widely varied career, you may have come in contact with some men whom we may call 'chevaliers d'industrie'—men who are occasionally entangled in political affairs, and who are not over-scrupulous as to the means they use in attaining their ends."

"Pish!" I retorted. "I do not know that any man who dabbles in *weltpolitik* is over-scrupulous as to the means of achieving an end. You might be referring to a prime minister, or a *vaurien*. They are equally careless of what the world considers honorable means."

The Count of Raday was silent.

"Suppose, monsieur," I suggested, "you tell me the manner in which the archduke is supposed to have lost the papers."

"It is unknown," he answered.

"Have there been no events which connect themselves with the papers, either before or after their disappearance? Has the archduke shown them to any one outside the Hapsburg family and its advisers?"

"I did my best to keep him from it," Count Raday said, "but he did show them to a friend."

"*Cherchez la femme?*"

"Alas, yes, monsieur. She is a beautiful woman, young, married to one of our attachés of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Baroness Clothilde Parhazy is her name. But she has been under the espionage of the secret police, and every place connected with her has been thoroughly searched."

"Your police are quite careful." I spoke with an inward smile, for I had once suffered inspection at the hands of the Austrian police. They were not successful in the search, I may add. The reason is very simple. When they were searching my apartments in Vienna, that for which they looked was in Brussels, carefully guarded by my man, Imhof.

"Is there any suspicion attached to the baroness?" I inquired.

"On the archduke's part, no; for my part, I suspect every woman."

"That is ungallant and unwise, monsieur. I trust every woman. The result is better."

"Ah, monsieur, now that I have told you, let me return to the archduke, and inform him that you will aid us in this frightful trouble. You do not realize what it means to his

Imperial Highness. Should the Emperor discover the loss of the papers—and it may occur at any time—it may mean that the archduke will go into exile, or that he be deprived of his rank and titles."

"Come, monsieur," I answered, "I will help the archduke. But he must come to Paris. I can help him only through himself. Bid him be here in as short a time as possible. Let him go to the Hôtel Bristol attended by his suite. He will be entertained and fêted. But this I must demand, that at every entertainment he gives an invitation be sent to me. Then, when my conclusions are completed, I will see what is to be done. Between us, Count de Raday, my suspicions rest in a quarter of which you would not dream, and they have no connection with the Baroness Clothilde." I turned to the count, as though to inform him that our interview was at an end.

"Thank you, monsieur!" he cried. "Where the greatest detectives have failed, you may succeed. You know men; they know only criminals."

"No compliments, I beg, monsieur." I extended my hand to him.

The Paris papers found much cause for comment in the presence of the archduke. The fact that he was surrounded by his retinue, and traveled in state, could mean but one thing. His mission to Paris was on matters politic. A rapprochement between France and Austria was discussed, and a thousand and one conjectures hazarded. But even the astute journalists are sometimes wrong. They cannot read between lines when there is a secret meaning purposely placed therein. So, the world knew that the Archduke Maximilian-Otto was in Paris on a mission from the Emperor.

The archduke and I met frequently, and from him I learned the whole secret of the papers, and the course they had pursued from the time they left the archives of the imperial house of Hapsburg, to the day they disap-

peared from the view of Maximilian-Otto, greatly to his distress.

Twice, I dined with the archduke, and I was present at a musicale he gave, when he showed me much attention. *Tout Paris*, the shallow, mocking world which had turned a cold shoulder upon me five years before, again remembered my presence. Romantic stories were told of my lengthy absence. I had found a diamond mine. I had been to the Klondike. I had inherited a fortune. I had won an immense amount of money at cards. All, all, equally foolish.

The archduke had been in Paris a week when Count de Raday, as Master of the Household to the Archduke Maximilian-Otto, came to my apartment.

"Have you found no clue, as yet, monsieur?" he inquired.

"I am satisfied," I responded.

"But when can you hope to let us know where the papers are?"

"It will all be in good time, monsieur," I replied; "all in good time. Meanwhile, may I have the permission of the archduke to entertain, at a dinner, in his honor? Much depends upon my ability to have the right people gathered around the archduke at a certain time. Bring the matter before him, and let me know upon what day you decide."

"But the guests? From what rank of society?"

"I will submit my invitation list to the archduke," I answered. "But he will not strike off one name, for there will be no one to whom he can take exception. The guests will be, principally, from the Faubourg St. Germain. The others will all be people known to his Imperial Highness."

"How many are involved?" Count de Raday asked.

"Directly, one; indirectly, one thousand."

It was on a Thursday that I gave my long-to-be-remembered dinner in honor of the Archduke Maximilian-Otto, of Austria-Hungary. It was a small dinner of forty covers, and was laid in the dining-room of my apartment. I do not live in a shabby style,

though the late count, my father, left me an inheritance of eight thousand francs and my title.

My guests were from the Faubourg, from the Jockey Club, from the Cercle of the rue Royale, and from the embassies. The Austrian ambassador was there, and the representatives of other great powers.

When the dinner was finished, Imhof appeared in the door of the dining-room, followed by three other servants. Each bore a tray laden with closely wrapped packages, sealed tightly at the ends. Imhof, alone, bore one package on his salver, a casket of golden filigree, in which was yet another casket of solid metal, locked with a tiny padlock.

Then I rose and, addressing my guests, begged that the little souvenirs of the dinner which I had prepared would not be opened until after the guests had reached their homes. It was a unique request, and a buzz of conversation greeted it.

As I escorted the archduke to his carriage, I handed him a key.

"It will unlock the inner casket," I explained, "and, in future, your Imperial Highness had better keep all papers in the secret archives of the Hapsburgs." No one heard the words save Raday, and, except us three, no one in the world knows how certain state papers of Austria rested for three months in the safe-deposit vaults of a great Paris bank, in a box labeled, "Count Pierre de Deux Ponts."

You will ask how I came by the papers, and why.

The answer is very simple. I am one of the chevaliers d'industrie to whom the Count de Raday referred; yet, I am, also, at the head of a noble house. Despite all that I could do, I found my social position slipping from me. Whispers began to run through the ears of Paris that Pierre de Deux Ponts did not respect certain laws of France, and that he was under the supervision of the *gardiens de la paix*.

It took me almost two years to obtain the papers for whose return the archduke was so anxious. But, once

in my hands, they were safe from all outside interference. I know how to cover my tracks. That Count de Raday should have come to me for help was not strange, for it had been so contrived that the suggestion would be made for such a move.

But, to-day, *tout Paris*, shallow and fickle as of old, flocks to my apartment in the avenue Wagram; is on my drag at Auteuil and Longchamps; in my

box at the Opéra, and comes for the shooting at my château.

I think the archduke suspects; yet he sends me a costly present every year. He is not ungrateful, and, after all, it taught him a lesson in prudence. For that alone he should be thankful.

Another member of the Haute Pégre might have used the papers in a far different manner. Not so Pierre de Deux Ponts.



THE PATH ACROSS THE MOOR

ONE harvest evening as I took the road from Glenties fair,
I o'ertook a red-lipped *cailin** of modest mien and air;
So pleasant our discoursing was, it grieved me, to be sure,
When she said, at length, "Good-bye, kind sir, my path's across the moor."

I looked upon her wistfully—her gaze fell on the grass.
"It's lonesome walking, is the moor," I said, "*mo chailín deas*;†
The path is not so narrow, but there's room for two, I'm sure;
If you don't object, I'll take with you the path across the moor."

"The moon is up, the path is straight," she answered, courteously,
"And I never do feel lonesome when I'm crossing of Tíree;
I thank you very kindly, sir, but to my father's door
I've always took the path alone," she said, "across the moor."

"That the path's both safe and pleasant, too, for one, I'm sure is true;
But you guess not its delights," I said, "when jogged along by two."
"A kind good-bye, pray, gentle sir! My father he is poor,
And I, a humble maid, have never been beyont the moor."

"You do your father wrong," I said, "for his is wealth untold,
The King of Royal Spain is not so rich for all his gold.
And rank and worldly riches, they for me have little lure—
I'd barter both, with you to walk henceforth across the moor!"

I looked into her tender eyes; she blushed and cast them down.
I touched my lips upon her hand; still Rosie did not frown.
I took her hands in both of mine, and prisoned them secure,
And she murmured, "You may join me on the path across the moor."

SEUMAS MACMANUS.

* Colleen, little girl.

† My pretty little girl (*mo cholleen dyass*).



IN civilized countries, it is illegal for a man to marry until he is old enough to know better.

WHEN MCCREADY TURNED MISSIONARY

By Anne O'Hagan

McCREADY was looking at Miss Crystal with the glazed eye of disapproval. One or two of the staff, taking note of his lowering brow and his hanging jaw, and following his gaze, concluded that he was dissatisfied with her work, and confided to one another that they, also, had marked its lack of "go."

Miss Crystal sat at her desk, oblivious of the brief attention she was attracting, her gray eyes heavy, her full, scarlet lips fallen into a curve of purposeless unhappiness. Even her red hair, usually vivid enough to redeem her from a look of listlessness, seemed unaccountably lacking in brilliancy that day.

As a question of fact, McCready's disapproval was personal, and not professional, that morning. He had never objected to the commonplace level of Miss Crystal's "stories." He had said, once or twice, that there was enough cheap flippancy, enough mock pathos and enough sham philosophy in the paper, and that her clear, cool English was a joy after the perfervid rhetoric of the "stars." Besides that, he had intimated that it was a priceless blessing to *The Cry* to have in its employ a woman who bore herself like a lady, and who could thus gain admission to places where "Alice Ben Bolt" would be *persona non grata*.

To-day, he was scowling over the possibility that he had been mistaken in Miss Crystal, after all. He was seeing her as he had seen her the night before, seated at a table in Curate's. Curate's was the newest and most ornate of all the after-theatre resorts. Lights winked from a thousand yellow-

brown eyes along the bronze-leather walls, music trickled sentimentally from an unexpected gallery railed in green and bronze. Ladies, the conscientious brilliancy of whose complexions and jewels ought to have atoned for the somewhat tarnished luster of their minds, ate and drank expensively with escorts of callow ecstasy or of satiated self-indulgence, while other women studied them with frank insolence, or ignored them blandly.

It was not a social lapse to be seen at Curate's. McCready's own gray-haired wife and his young dryad of a daughter had sat under his bristling protection, and had recognized only gaiety and glitter in the scene. But Miss Crystal had had no such chaperonage. Mr. Crawford Duncan could not be esteemed by even the most casual and innocent-eyed of observers, a well-chosen companion for a young woman. To McCready, who knew, as all the town did, his standing as a roué of parts, a libertine of attractions even more potent than his reputation, the sight had been painful. The fact that in some indefinable way the girl—a shining vision against the dull wall, with her red hair, her yellow bodice, and the glass of yellow wine with which she played—had fitted into her surroundings, had not lessened McCready's distaste for them. He had not the soul of an artist, McCready, and certain harmonies did not appeal to him.

"Damn it!" he said to himself, "she must know his reputation. She must know his wife." A vision of the drab little bearer of Mr. Duncan's name, with the thin, uncertain smile that was

the result—or the cause—of Mr. Duncan's wanderings, flashed before him. He remembered her in her box at the opera, in her victoria on the Avenue, always pitifully dwarfed by the splendor of her appurtenances. McCready, city editor of *The Cry*, was not in society, and he knew the little woman only in her public and official appearances. But they were enough. Miss Crystal, newspaper woman, no mere child, must know approximately all that he knew. If she chose to dine alone with the man, it was none of McCready's business. He was no reformer, to be looking out for the morals of his staff. But he had not thought her that sort, and—

He rang the bell sharply. "Tell Miss Crystal to come here," he growled, sinking his chin in his collar, and scowling prodigiously. The boy obeyed with cheerful alacrity. Miss Crystal blushed a little as she came forward. She had seen her grim chief the night before, and she was not used to being unconventional.

"Mornin'," said McCready. "Nothing much to-day. Wedding out in Glen Ridge. A Miss Greyer—this afternoon, at four."

"Do they want it reported?" asked Miss Crystal, a premonition of rebuffs chilling her. She hated to "do society" in any of its guises.

"Sure to. They always do, no matter what they pretend," said McCready, with the conviction of a man who does not have to put his faith to the test. Miss Crystal did not attempt to controvert the favorite axiom of her editor, unless her colorless smile could be construed as argument.

"Anyway," pursued McCready, "they are friends of the old man, and you'll be all right. Dick, look up trains to Glen Ridge for Miss Crystal."

When, finally, the door of the city room closed upon her departing figure, McCready ruminated: "See how that'll strike her. Wedding—'Voice that breathed'—tum, tum, te-tum!—'Cherish so long as ye both shall—' Maybe, she'll come to her senses. She can't want to do wrong, and there's no half-

way with Duncan—not for a woman in her position. With one of his own set, perhaps—well, maybe, if she were as heartless as he."

Later, lunching with Williamson, the advertising man, he had anxiously inquired—veiling both question and anxiety under gruff declaration—if women were not always sentimentalists, turned into the paths of peace or of disquietude by the mere influence of the moment, played upon by moods, likely to become as little children if they heard an old tune. And when Williamson indifferently agreed, McCready banished the furrow from his forehead and the fear from his heart, telling himself again that "the wedding service would fetch her."

Commonly, Miss Crystal loathed her work. She deeply disliked attending "parties" to which she had not been invited, and putting questions to persons who did not wish to answer them. She had never outgrown a tradition that such things were ill-bred, and she found it in her heart to forgive many counter-examples of ill-breeding because of her perception of their justification. Her talents, however, were not enough to advance her to a more dignified place in her profession, and her attainments in other directions prevented a change of calling.

To-day, she welcomed the quiet of the brief journey. She would devote it, not to the planning of questions in regard to Miss Greyer's trousseau or wedding-presents or bridesmaids' names—not even to reading the two-line clipping which Mr. McCready had given her as a guide, but entirely to her own situation.

Should she, or should she not? Life was dull, work was monotonous, she was unutterably lonely now that there was no longer a home, either the home of her old affections or the home of the dreams she had once dreamed, to give her a sense of companionship and love. Her eyes grew hard as she surveyed the flying landscape, and the red line of her lips spelt bitterness.

It is not good to sneer at one's past when one plans one's future. She

sneered at the thought of the home she had dreamed of during her engagement, six years before, to Owen Bromley—a little place, all climbing roses in Summer and hearth-fires in Winter, and walks and peaceful twilight talks together—and love!

Then, when her father had died, how tranquilly Owen had yielded to her suggestion that he should not be hampered in the very beginning of his career as an engineer by an engagement with a girl who had a mother to support! And now she had not heard of him for four years—not even when, after three years, her mother had died. Ah, well! perhaps he had not heard. And even if he had, and had come, there would have been no glow in the welcome to him. The youth was gone from her, then, she told herself, and she did not care.

She could not tell when the craving for excitement first took hold of her—some time, she supposed, when the healthy pleasures of young womanhood had been too long withheld, when the routine of her days had dulled her sensitiveness a little. Then she had obtained her stimulant; a flush crept over her face, the counterpart of the one McCready had seen the night before. She had met Crawford Duncan; it was not for nothing that silly women called him fascinating. She had drifted, and now she could drift no more, she knew, clothe his demands in what words of friendship or respect he would.

Friendship! She laughed. Was it much friendship that had cut lines about his mouth, burned hollows about his eyes? All that he asked, he said, was some few of the intimacies of mere friendship—the chance to see her, occasionally, alone, not in a glittering, noisy restaurant, with a table between them and hunger dividing their interest in each other; only an opportunity to talk to her, sometimes, alone, to persuade her that he was not so black a villain as he was commonly painted. She was a working-woman, he told her, therefore above the stupid, small conventionalities. What

did it matter that she had no chaperon, or that she did not know his wife?

"I wonder," she said to herself, "how many women are driven to folly and to sin by mere boredom, by the desire to keep hold of the one excitement of their lives? And I used to think that only unhappy love could force one out of the way of peace and dignity! Unhappy love, indeed!"

"Glen Ridge!" shouted the conductor; and she hurried out of the train.

She walked toward the Greyer house. She was blind for a while to the beauty of the day, and her mind kept repeating his words of last night. "We cannot go on like this any longer. You must give me something, show some trust in me, in my deep regard for you. To-morrow must end it, one way or the other. Unless you will grant me the little that I ask—a little share in your life—that is all—then I shall give you up entirely."

"It would be very stupid if he went away, really," she said to herself. "And, perhaps, after all, he means what he says."

Then, her eyes caught sight of a sloping lawn with cherry-trees white upon it, and her heart gave a leap. How long had it been since she had seen the Spring come to the countryside!

She reached the Greys' house with her own problems half-forgotten. The delicious warmth of the air, the stirrings in the billowy-blossomed trees, the look of the April sky—all these were of another world from the fevered one in which she had been dwelling. The two could not co-exist. She deferred her decisions.

The house was of gray stone, broad and stately. Imposing drives cut its long stretch of lawn; pale wistaria clung to its rough sides; back of it, an orchard was beautiful. It was so fair, so peaceful a place that Miss Crystal forgot, in her content with it, to be envious of those to whom it belonged. A kindly glow pervaded her for the bride who was to go forth from a

shelter so perfect as this to the dearer one that love should make for her.

"No, no; you can't find out nothin' now," whispered the man at the door, who had intercepted her ring. "The party's just comin' down to the library, now, miss. The ceremony is just goin' to begin. Afterward, Mr. Cartwright—he's the best man, miss—will see the reporters."

She nodded, her eyes wandering to the trees before the house.

"If you'll step inside, miss," went on the butler, "I think I could stand you on the stairs, where you could have a lovely view of the ceremony."

Again Miss Crystal smiled and nodded. A white vision leaning upon an elderly arm was just disappearing from the hall into the embowered room at its end, as the butler motioned her to a place on the stairs. She looked in, upon the great room, the somberness of its books contending with the glory of blossoms, the lights from its high, colored windows giving it a church-like air. She saw the centre picture, the white robes of the clergyman, the white dress of the bride, the half-encircling wall of pink and black where the rose-hued bridesmaids and the ushers stood, behind them the blurred gaiety of the wedding-party. Then, she looked at the figure beside the slender bride. The vague smile died from her lips, the pleased light from her eyes. That immaculate figure, that clear-cut face, were those of her old lover. It was Owen Bromley's wedding that she had blindly come out to report.

The brief service seemed to her interminable. In its length, she was able to see again all her own early hopes and wistful fancies—dead long since, dead with what she had called her love, but somehow alive enough to be outraged now by this scene with its miserable contrasts.

"Let me out!" she cried, fiercely, to the astonished butler, as the solemn words ceased, and a sudden flurry of laughter and talk and crowding about the bridal pair began, while from the music-room across the hall the organ

notes of the wedding-march pealed jubilantly.

"Why, I thought—" he began.

"Never mind, never mind that! Let me out!" And he opened the door, and stared at her in uncomprehending disapproval as she fled down the path.

Once beyond the high arbor-vitæ hedge that screened the Greyer place from vulgar observation, she hurried along, she knew not in what direction. It was monstrous that she, working hard, working alone, so wretched and companionless that she could contemplate temptation without shrinking—it was monstrous that she should be sent to witness the prosperous—oh, the very highly prosperous!—wedding of the man whom she had once expected to marry herself! That she should have to report the wedding of Owen Bromley! How had it happened? She tore at her purse, jerked the clipping from it. Idiot that she had been not to have looked before! The statement was perfectly clear:

On Tuesday, April 26, Miss Henrietta Greyer, the youngest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Isaac Greyer, will be married to Mr. Owen Bromley, son of the late Owen Bromley, of Baltimore. The wedding will take place at four o'clock in the afternoon, at the Greyer place in Glen Ridge.

If only she had read that in time, and had spared herself this bitter humiliation!

At any rate, she knew one thing now, she told herself, as she hurried along. She would never sacrifice one moment's enjoyment, one moment's promise of enjoyment, for any hope of good or any memory of good. Of course, she had no love now for the correct, self-seeking man back there—it had been long since she had had it; but, oh, how tenderly she had thought she loved him in the foolish days when she offered him the chance to make a swifter, surer, steadier way to success without her! And he was marrying—correctly, advantageously—and she supposed that she might report his wife's receptions when they were in town next Winter!

On and on she fled, careless as to whither. April was powerless now to win a look from her. Henceforth, she told herself, planning a new, bitter rule of life, henceforth, she would take what the gods provided. She had an insane sense of revenging herself upon Owen Bromley when she made this resolve. She would flirt, she would extract the utmost of mirth from each moment as it came. Hitherto, she had always rather held aloof from the noisy gaiety, the hail-fellow-well-met intimacies of the office. But, for the future, these—anything, everything! To-day it was Crawford Duncan who offered her excitement, comradeship of a sort—love, he would call it, as soon as she gave him the chance to speak! Well, she would take it all! And when that was over, she would not be so old or so unlovely that others should not minister to her craving for admiration and attention. After all, it might not soon be over. Surely, Crawford Duncan could love as truly and as long as that man back there whom she had heard vowing to endow with all his worldly goods the millionaire's daughter.

Again she heard the triumphant swelling of the organ, and her mind supplied familiar words:

"Valiant and free—faithful confessed—"

The mockery, the mockery of that! Her rage gave place to self-pity as she remembered.

At the top of a high hill, she recollected that she had no idea of her whereabouts. A broad valley, foaming with blossoming orchards, tender with an infinitude of Spring greens, lay below her, a faint mist veiling the perfect glory of the afternoon. She saw towns on the slopes of the distant hillsides flash into being; she saw houses, here and there, in the big bowl below her; she saw a narrow river gleam among the verdure. But all the region was totally unfamiliar to her town eyes. She hesitated. The hill was bordered on one side by a heavy growth of trees, and she thought that she heard sounds among them. She

wished to inquire her whereabouts and her road back to the city; so, she waited, listening, and suddenly very weak from hurry, emotion and the languor of the season.

A laugh rippled upon the air; then came a shrill cry of delight—a child's cry; then, a confused, bubbling sound of young voices. They came from out the wood, part way down the hill. She ventured on, and when she came opposite the place where she had fixed them in her mind she called, "Children!"

There was no answer, and the weariness that had attacked her so suddenly after the intensity of her excitement and resolutions grew greater at the sight of the long descent to the plain, and of the longer journey to the nearest house. She paused a moment, then left the road, parting the bushes near it carefully, and made her way into the wood recess.

"Children!" she called again, as the young trees near the edge of the grove closed behind her. Still there was silence, except for the tremulous voices of the Spring afternoon. But she pressed on, farther into the cool, green light. The sound of a trickling stream became her guide.

By-and-bye she came upon it—a thread, winding in and out among rocks and the roots of trees it had bared from their covering of earth. And, following it, she found the children, three of them, lying flat on their stomachs, their faces peering into the brook where it had widened and calmed for a moment, into a pool.

"Oh, there you are!" cried Miss Crystal, happily. To have found guides now seemed to her a real good fortune, little as she would have allowed the possibility of that an hour before.

"Oh, *please* hush!" entreated the fat little girl of the trio, barely looking up, and waving a chubby hand of rebuke in the direction of Miss Crystal. "There, he's gone! She's frightened him!" She rolled around to a sitting posture with a good deal of plump difficulty, as her companions righted themselves and stared at Miss Crystal.

"Oh, I'm sorry I intruded!" said that young woman, meeting three pairs of reproachful eyes. "But I'm lost, and I heard your voices; you were talking, yourselves, a while ago."

"Yes," said the larger boy, in a tone of righteous judgment. "We were, but that was before we saw the fish. We thought he might be a trout! He was under the shelf of that rock there." He pointed to a boulder that projected a foot or two in the water.

"Indeed, I'm sorry," apologized the interrupter. "But since I have spoiled your afternoon's sport, won't you tell me where I am and how to get away?"

The younger boy looked at her gravely. The severe aspect of his round face was not lightened, as was the other boy's, by any redeeming freckles near his blue eyes. He was all judgment, untempered by levity of any sort.

"It depends," he announced, "on which way you want to go."

"She wants to go to New York," declared the little girl, promptly, giving one indifferent glance at Miss Crystal's brown frock, and proceeding to dig diligently in the soft earth with her heel.

"Do you?" asked the younger boy. Miss Crystal nodded; she also smiled. And when Miss Crystal smiled like that—frankly, whole-heartedly, youthfully—she was a very pretty woman. The older boy noted this, though he could not have defined it. He brushed aside all question of destination.

"Say," he said, while the Solomon of the party still revolved in his mind the question of routes, "I could show you some white violets if you had time."

Miss Crystal was very tired. Her knees were weak. She suddenly thought herself that it is not good to go luncheonless on an enervating day in Spring, and that it is never invigorating to give one's self up to rages and disappointments. She sat down on a stump, rather suddenly.

"I am afraid I haven't time," she answered, a trifle faintly. "Some other day, perhaps."

"Huh!" sniffed the little girl, in

swift disdain of this banality. "How long do you think white violets stay?"

"That's true, they are brief-lived, aren't they? But how shall I get to New York?"

"Do you want to go on a train or a trolley?" persisted the accurate youth.

"Whichever will take me the quicker." Miss Crystal looked at her watch; it was after five o'clock.

"That's a pretty watch," declared the girl, who had drawn near the stump.

"I'm glad you like it," replied Miss Crystal, courteously.

"Did your mother give it to you?"

"No."

"If you want to go to New York quickly, you had better go on the train. Don't you know where you are at?"

Miss Crystal shook her head. She felt more and more wearied.

"Well, you're at Preston's—that is, you're near Preston's, and if you get there in time, they'll flag a train for you."

"What time?" asked Miss Crystal, struggling to her feet.

"Oh, any time when there's a train coming along."

The bigger boy had disappeared at a bend in the brook. He came back now, flushed and bare-headed, carrying his hat in his hand. With very earthy fingers he presented it to her.

"There are the violets," he said, briefly.

Miss Crystal looked at him and at his gift. Cool and starry-white in the torn lining of his cap the flowers lay, their silken stems still flecked with damp mold. He flushed, uncomfortably, beneath the sudden, pitiful gratitude of her glance.

"I got 'em for you!" he said. "Ain't you goin' to take 'em?"

"You should say, 'aren't you going to take them,'" corrected the little girl.

"I am," said Miss Crystal, tears in her eyes. "I am, and I'm going to keep them."

"Oh, they don't last long," said the boy.

"If you're coming to Preston's," announced the younger boy, patiently, "you'd better come. We've got to go home in time to wash our hands before tea."

"Oh, I am thoughtless," cried the woman, springing to her feet. "And were you going to take me to the station?"

"Of course," said the trio, briefly and simultaneously.

The green light in the woods faded to a green twilight. The soft breeze fluttered into stillness; the brook's ripple, the evening calling of birds, sounded together. From some pool in the woods the frogs set up their loud Spring cry. The solemn boy possessed himself of one of Miss Crystal's hands, the girl of the other. The giver of the violets shuffled along at one side, nonchalantly switching at the bushes. He was still blushing over the access of sentiment which had prompted his offering, but he whistled and switched the more strenuously to hide his embarrassment.

"Some time I am coming to see you," declared Miss Crystal, earnestly, as the station-agent shambled out to flag the train. She was a woman of impulses. The half-hour in the dim grove, with the sweetness of the earth in her nostrils and the sight of the children in her eyes, seemed to her now miraculous, a sacred wonder wrought for her salvation. "I am coming to see you surely. I am glad you told me your names, Amy and Lawrence and Joe. You have been very kind to me. I shall not forget."

"Oh, it wasn't anything," declared the big boy. "It's on our way home, anyway."

Then, they watched her swing aboard the train, and stood, the boys with their caps decorously in hand, to catch her farewell smile and the wave of her hand.

The door of the telephone booth was open. McCready noticed with a grim amusement that Miss Crystal went at once to it, and did not go to her desk to begin work when she came in. He heard her call. Indeed, it must be recorded that McCready did not conscientiously try to avoid hearing the call.

"Is that Mr. Duncan? Yes? This is Miss Crystal, Mr. Duncan. I shall not be at home this evening. You remember I promised to let you know. No, no. Oh, no, thank you! No. It is quite impossible. To-morrow? I think it a very excellent plan, and I hope that you will have a very pleasant voyage. Good-bye."

Even through a telephone receiver, McCready thought, a man must perceive and appreciate the finality of Miss Crystal's tones.

"I'm sorry, Mr. McCready," began Miss Crystal, appearing at the desk. "I forgot to get the names of the ushers and the list of the guests. I—I felt suddenly ill during the ceremony, and came away."

"Let it go," mumbled McCready. "Big strike ordered at the cotton works in Fall River; no room for weddings, anyway, to-morrow. And now, Miss Crystal, Mrs. McCready wants you to come up to dinner with us to-night—oh, yes, perfectly informally. No one else there but Walton. You know Walton, don't you? No? One of the editorial writers. Do come. Mrs. McCready begged you to waive formality. She ought to have called, and all that, but you're a busy woman—and—that's right. I'll be ready in fifteen minutes."

And, as McCready went off himself to telephone—taking the precaution to close the door of the booth, however—he said to himself, in simple-minded triumph: "I knew the wedding service would fetch her!"



A MAN'S pride that he is a man is apt to be rudely shaken if he notices his fellow-men.

A SONG OF LOVES

IN the blue morn, the new morn,
 Beneath a sun-filled sky,
 Oh, I met a little Love
 When all the clouds were high;
 A little Love, a wistful Love—
 I would not have him stay;
 I loosed his hands, and kissed his lips,
 And bade him fly away.

In the warm noon, the sweet noon,
 When all the air was gold,
 Oh, I met a fair, great Love
 With merry eyes and bold;
 So wise, so strong, so wonderful,
 Too high for my estate,
 He loosed my hands, and kissed my lips,
 And left me desolate.

In the deep night, the cold night,
 Who comes through wind and rain?
 Little Love I bade away
 Is at my side again.
 And he hath warmed my hands in his,
 And kissed my wet eyes dry.
 Oh, strange that he should comfort me
 For that great Love gone by.

JOHN WINWOOD.



HOW IT HAPPENED

THE CHRONIC MEDDLER—You are extremely bald, for one of your age.
 THE BARE-PATED PARTY—Yes; got this way by butting into other people's affairs.



LIMITED SPACE

ASKINGTON—Your flat is rather small, isn't it?
 CRAMPSMITH—Yes! It's an actual fact that we haven't room for a doubt in it.

VERS DE SOCIÉTÉ IN FOREIGN TONGUES

By Brander Matthews

“FAMILIAR verse” is the apt term Cowper preferred to describe the lyric of mingled sentiment and playfulness which is more generally and more carelessly called *vers de société*. The lyric of this sort is less emotional, or at least less expansive, than the regular lyric; and it seeks to veil the depth of its feeling behind a debonair assumption of gaiety. Familiar verse is in poetry closely akin to what in prose is known as the eighteenth-century essay; Prior and Gay were early representatives of the one, as Steele and Addison were the creators of the other. Familiar verse is a far better designation than *vers de société* for two reasons: first, because the use of a French phrase might seem to imply that these witty and graceful poems are more abundant in French literature than in English—which is not so; and second, because, however light and bright these lyrics may be, they are not mere society-verses, with only the glitter and the emptiness of the fashionable parade. They are not the idle amusement of those

Who tread with jaded step the weary mill—
Grind at the wheel, and call it “pleasure”
still;

Gay without mirth, fatigued without employ,
Slaves to the joyless phantom of a joy.

No doubt, the true *vers de société* must have polish and finish and the well-bred ease of the man of the world; but they ought also to carry a suggestion at least of the more serious aspects of life. They should not be frothily frivolous or coldly cynical, any more than they should broadly comic or boisterously funny. They are at lib-

erty to hint at hidden tears, even when they seem to be wreathed in smiles. They have no right to parade mere cleverness; and they must shun all affectation as they must avoid all self-consciousness. They should appear to possess a colloquial carelessness which is ever shrinking from the commonplace, and which has succeeded in concealing every trace of the labor of the literary artist by which alone they have attained their seemingly spontaneous perfection.

“Familiar verse” is, perhaps, somewhat more exact than the term once employed by Mr. Stedman—“patrician rhymes”—which is a designation possibly a little chilly for these airy lyrics. To fall fully within the definition, so the late Frederick Locker-Lampson asserted, a poem must be brief and brilliant; and the late Tom Hood added that it ought also to be buoyant. Brevity, brilliancy, buoyancy—these are qualities we cannot fail to find in the best of Locker-Lampson’s own verses, in Praed’s, in Prior’s—and also in Holmes’s, in Bret Harte’s and in Mr. Stedman’s.

Brevity it must have, first of all; and Locker-Lampson excludes the “Rape of the Lock,” “on account of its length, which renders it much too important,” although it “would otherwise be one of the finest specimens of *vers de société* in any language.” Here it is permissible to echo the opinion of Poe, who held that a poem could scarcely exceed one hundred lines in length under penalty of losing its unity of impression. But, on the other hand, the poem of this species must not be excessively condensed, or else it is not im-

portant enough. A couplet does not give room to turn round in. Gay's

Life is a jest, and all things show it;
I said so once, and now I know it.

and Pope's

I am his Highness's dog at Kew,
Pray, sir, tell me—whose dog are you?

have rather the sharp snap of the epigram than the gentler flow of genuine *vers de société*. And so, certain of the slighter pieces in the Greek anthology, lovely as they are and exquisite, lack the modest amplitude fairly to be expected from a poem which claims admission into this charmed circle.

Brilliant it must be also; and this requirement excludes "Sally in Our Alley," for example, because it is "too homely and too entirely simple and natural," and it keeps out "John Gilpin" as well, because it is too frankly comic in its intent, too boldly funny. But the brilliancy must not be excessive; and the diffused glow of the incandescent lamp is better than the sputtering glare of the arc light. If the brilliancy is attained by too violent and too obvious an effort, the light lyric is likely to harden into artificiality; and this is a danger that even Praed does not always escape. His "Chaunt of the Brazen Head" has a luster that is almost metallic; the sparkle is undeniable, but in time the insistent antithesis reveals itself as mechanical, at least, not to call it either tricky or tiresome.

Buoyancy is the third requisite; and this is not so easy to define as the others. Yet its necessity is plain enough when we note how heavy certain metrical efforts may be, although they achieve brevity and even a superficial brilliance. They lack the final ease and the careless felicity; they are not wholly free from an awkwardness that is not unfairly to be termed lumbering. For example, buoyancy is just what is lacking in the rhyming episode of John Wilson Croker, "To Miss Peel, on her Marriage"—quatrains which Locker-Lampson held in sufficient esteem to include in his carefully chosen "Lyra Elegantiarum," and which Mr. Swin-

burne despondingly dismissed as "twenty villainous lines."

Just as comedy is ever in danger of declining into farce—a mishap that has almost befallen "The Rivals," for example—or else of stiffening into the serious drama—a turning aside that is visible in "Froufrou"—so, in like manner, has familiar verse ever to avoid breadth of humor on the one side and depth of feeling on the other. It must eschew, not merely coarseness or vulgarity, but even free and hearty laughter; and it must refrain from dealing not only with the soul-plumbing abysses of the tragic but even with the ground-swell of any sweeping emotion. It must keep on the crest of the waves, midway between the utter triviality of the murmuring shallows and the silent profundity of the depths that are dumb.

Perhaps this is one reason why so few of these brevet-poems have been the work of the greater wits or of the greater poets; familiar verse is too serious to carry all the fun of the jesters, and too slight to convey the more solemn message of the major bards. Rather has it been the casual recreation of true lyrists not in the front rank, or else it has been the sudden excursion of those not reckoned among the songsters, often men of the world for once achieving in verse a seeming spontaneity, like that which gives zest to delightful conversation.

Perhaps, again, this is a reason why *vers de société* can be found flourishing most luxuriantly when the man of the world is himself most abundant, and when he has helped to set up an ideal of sparkling nimbleness in the give-and-take of social encounter. "When society ceases to be simple, it becomes skeptical," and, when it "becomes refined, it begins to dread the exhibition of strong feeling." So wrote one of the reviewers of Locker-Lampson's collection. "In such an atmosphere, emotion takes refuge in jest, and passion hides itself in skepticism of passion." And the reviewer added that there is a delicious piquancy in the poets who represent this social mood,

and who are put in a class apart by "the way they play bo-peep with their feelings."

In the stately sentences of his time, the elder Disraeli declared that, in the production of *vers de société*, "genius will not always be sufficient to impart that grace of amenity which seems peculiar to those who are accustomed to elegant society. These productions are more the effusions of taste than genius, and it is not sufficient that the poet is inspired by the Muse, he must also suffer his concise page to be polished by the hand of the Graces." Locker-Lampson maintained that "the tone should not be pitched high; it should be idiomatic, and rather in the conversational key; the rhythm should be crisp and sparkling, and the rhyme frequent and never forced, while the entire poem should be marked by tasteful moderation, high finish, and completeness; for, however trivial the subject-matter may be, indeed rather in proportion to its triviality, subordination to the rules of composition and perfection of execution should be strictly enforced." And Mr. Austin Dobson, drawing up "Twelve Good Rules" for the writer of familiar verse, advised him to be "colloquial but not commonplace," to be as witty as he liked, to be "serious by accident," and to be "pathetic with the greatest discretion."

II

THOSE who may search Greek literature for frequent examples of familiar verse are doomed to disappointment; and even in the lovely lyrics of the "Anthology," so human, so sad, so perfect in precision of phrase, we fail to find the lightness, the playfulness, the gaiety of true *vers de société*. We note brevity nearly always, brilliancy sometimes, and even buoyancy occasionally; we mark a lapidary concision that only Landor, of all the moderns, was ever able to achieve; but we feel that the tone is a little too grave and a little too austere. Perhaps the Greek spirit was too simple and too lofty to stoop

to the pleasantry and prettiness of familiar verse. Perhaps the satiric reaction against excessive romanticism, which sustains so much modern *vers de société*, was not possible before the birth of romance itself. Perhaps, indeed, the banter and the gently satiric playfulness of *vers de société* were not to be expected in a race which, no matter how gifted it might be lyrically, kept woman in social inferiority, and denied her the social privileges that give to modern society its charm and its variety.

At first glance, it would seem as though more than one lyric of Anacreon, at least, and perhaps of Theocritus also, ought to fall well within the most rigid definition of familiar verse. But there is scarcely a single poem of Anacreon's which really approaches the type we are seeking. The world for which he wrote reveals itself as very narrow; and he is found to be devoid of "catholicity of human interest," as Tom Hood asserted. His verses are a little lacking in tenderness of sentiment; and, as Professor Jebb says, Anacreon's "sensuousness is tempered merely by intellectual charm"—and this is not what we require in social verse.

Theocritus, also, exquisite as are his vignettes of Alexandrian life, perfect as they are in tone and feeling, clear cut as an intaglio and delightful as a Tanagra figurine—Theocritus is at once too idyllic and too realistic. His verses are without certain of the characteristics which are imperative in true *vers de société*. They are at once a little too homely and a little too poetic. If a selection from Greek literature were absolutely imperative, probably a copy of verses combining brevity, brilliancy and buoyancy could be found more easily among the scanty lyrics of Agathias or of Antipater than amid the larger store of Theocritus or of Anacreon.

Perhaps it is the more prominent position of woman in Rome which makes a search in Latin literature a more certain pleasure. Yet the world in which Catullus lived, that "tenderest of Ro-

man poets nineteen hundred years ago," while it was externally most luxurious, had an underlying rudeness and an ill-concealed coarseness. And Catullus himself, with all his nimble wit, his scholarly touch, his instinctive certainty of taste, was consumed by too fierce a flame of passion to be satisfied often with the leisurely interweaving of jest and earnest which we look for in the songster of society. Infrequently does he allow himself the courtly grace of true familiar verse—in his "Dedication for a Volume of Lyrics," in his "Invitation to Dinner" and in his "Morning Call," so sympathetically paraphrased by Landor.

Half a generation later, we come to Horace, a perfect master of the lighter lyric. He has the wide knowledge of a man of the world and the consummate ease of an accomplished craftsman in verse. He can achieve both the "curious felicity" and the "art that hides itself." And his tone, so Walter Bagehot insisted, "is that of prime ministers; the easy philosophy is that of courts and parliaments. . . . He is but the extreme and perfect type of a whole class of writers, some of whom exist in every literary age, and who give expression to what we may call the poetry of equanimity—that is, the world's view of itself, its self-satisfaction, its conviction that you must hear what comes, not hope for much, think *some* evil, never be excited, admire little, and then you will be at peace." Perhaps this view of Horace's philosophy is a little too disenchanting; but Bagehot here suggested why Horace was likely to be one of the masters of familiar verse; and it is the Roman poet's catholicity of human interest, even more than his exquisite naturalness, which makes his lines sometimes so startlingly modern. It was easy for Thackeray to find London equivalents for the Latin "*Persicos odi*," and for Molière earlier, and Mr. Austin Dobson later, to imitate "*Donec gratus*." But there is little need to cite further, for no poet has tempted more adapters and translators—not always, indeed, to his profit, and often, in fact,

to their undoing, since it is only by an inspiration as happy as the original that any modern may hope to equal the sureness of stroke characteristic of a poet who shunned the remote adjective, and who was ever content with the vocabulary of every day.

It is not pleasant to pass down from the benign rule of Augustus to the tyranny of Nero, and to contrast the constant manliness of Horace with the servility of Martial, a servility finding relief now and again in the utmost bitterness of unrestrained invective. Horace, with all his equanimity, was never indifferent to ideas—and he had an ethical code of his own; but Martial rarely revealed even a hint of moral feeling. He was cynical of necessity; and therefore is he habitually too hard and too rasping to attain the geniality which belongs to the better sort of social verse. Few of his poems are really long enough to be styled lyrics; and the vast majority are merely epigrams, with the wilful condensation and the arbitrary pointedness that have been the bane of the epigram ever since Martial set the bad example. But even though the Latin poet, as Professor Mackail asserts, made his strongest appeal "to all that was worst in Roman taste—its heavy-handedness, its admiration of verbal cleverness, its tendency toward brutality"—still, now and again it is possible to pick out a poem that falls fairly within the definition of familiar verse. There is, for example:

IN HABENTEM AMÆNAS ÆDES

Your parks are unsurpassed in noble trees;
A finer bath than yours one seldom sees;
Grand is your colonnade, and all complete
The stone mosaic underneath your feet;
Your steeds are fine; your hunting grounds
are wide,
And gleaming fountains spout on every side;
Your drawing-rooms are grand; there's nothing cheap
Except the places where you eat and sleep!
With all the space and splendor you have got,
Oh, what a charming mansion you have *not!*

III

WHEN at last we pass over the long suspension-bridge that arches the dark

gulf between the ancient world and the modern, we discover that the more direct inheritors of the Latin tradition, the Italians and the Spaniards, have neither of them contributed abundantly to this special department of lyric poetry. It may be that the Spanish language is too grandiloquent and too sonorous to be readily playful; and perhaps the Spanish character itself is either too loftily dignified or too realistically shrewd to be able often to achieve that harmonious blending of the grave and the gay which is essential in familiar verse. It is true that Lope de Vega, early master of every form of the drama and bold adventurer into every other realm of literature, has left us a few poems that might demand inclusion; and among them is an ingenious sonnet on the difficulty of making a sonnet—which was cleverly Englished by the late H. C. Bunner, and which may have suggested to Voiture his more famous rondeau. No doubt, there are a few other Spanish poets who might be enlisted as contributors to an international anthology of *vers de société*; but the fact remains that the Spanish section of any such collection would be slighter even than the Italian.

And the Italian contribution would not be very important, in spite of the national facility in improvisation—or perhaps because of this dangerous gift. In the earlier Italian Renaissance, existence seems to have been almost too strenuous for social verse. As we call the roll of the Italian poets, we may note the name of more than one master of the passionate lyric and of the scorching satire, but we find scarcely any writer who has left us verses of the requisite brevity, brilliancy and buoyancy. In Rossetti's "Dante and his Circle" there is more than one poem that seems to have this triple qualification, although, on more careful examination, the sentiment is seen to be too sincere and too frankly expressed, or else the tone is too rarely playful to warrant any liberal selection from these fascinating pages. Perhaps even from this volume a more lively little piece might, here and there, be bor-

rowed, such as Sachetti's "On a Wet Day," for instance. A little later there is Berni, whose metrical portrait of himself might fairly be compared—and not altogether to its disadvantage—with one or another of Praed's caressingly tender sketches of character. The Italians have no lack of biting epigram and of pertinent pasquinade; and they excel in broad burlesque and in laughable parody. But the mock-heroic, however clever it may be, is not the same as *vers de société*. And even in the nineteenth century, where there was a firmer social solidarity, the only name which forces itself on our attention is that of Giusti—whose idiomatic ballads have not unfairly been likened to the songs of Béranger.

The more northern languages are less likely to reward research, partly because of the prolonged rudeness of the Teutonic tongues and partly because of the more rigid seriousness of the folk that speak them. There is a true lyric grace in the songs of the Minnesingers, despite their frequent artificiality; but they again are too direct and too purely lyric. However ingenious they may be, they are without the wit and the humor which we look for in familiar verse. Even the later and far greater Goethe, who, for all his Olympian serenity, revealed at times the possession of that specific levity which is a prerequisite for the songster of society—even Goethe chose to condense his wit into the distichs of his "Xenien" rather than to commingle it with his balladry. He himself thought it strange that, with all he had done, there was no one of his poems "that would suit the Lutheran hymn-book;" and it is perhaps even stranger that scarcely any one of them would suit such an anthology as has been here suggested. Perhaps a claim might be made for his "Ergo Bibamus," which has almost briskness enough to warrant its acceptance.

From Heine, of course, a choice would be less difficult; and at least one of his lyrics, the "Grammar of the Stars," seems to meet all the requirements of familiar verse. But, af-

fluent as Heine is in sentiment, and master as he is of both girding satire and airy persiflage, there is ever a heart-break to be heard in his verses—an unforgettable sob. The chords of his lyre are really too deep and too resonant for him to chant trifles. The “brave soldier in the war of liberation of humanity,” as he styled himself, even in his paraded mockery and in his irrepressible wit, was really too much in earnest to happen often on the happy mean which makes familiar verse a possibility.

IV

In the French language at last the seeker after *vers de société* finds not only the name, but the thing itself, the real thing; and he finds it in abundance and of the best quality. Some part of this abundance is due, no doubt, to the French tongue itself, for, as a shrewd writer has reminded us, “a language long employed by a delicate and critical society is a treasury of dexterous felicities;” it may not be what Emerson finely called “fossil poetry,” but it is “crystallized *esprit*.” Society verse might be expected to flourish most luxuriantly among a people governed by the social instinct, as the French are, and as appreciative of the social qualities. The French invented the *salon*, which is the true hothouse for familiar verse; and they have raised correspondence and conversation also to the dignity of a fine art. As we scan the history of the past three centuries, we note that in France, society and literature have met on terms that approach equality far more nearly than in any other country. The French men of letters have frequently been men of the world, even if the French men of the world have been men of letters not quite so often as the English.

Moreover, it is in prose rather than in poetry that the French have achieved their amplest triumphs. To us of the Teutonic tradition, French poetry seems to be wanting in imaginative suggestiveness; it is too clear

and too precise and too logical; it fails to attain the Miltonic ideal of simplicity, sensuousness and passion. But, whatever the reservations an English reader must make in his praise of French poetry, he need make none in his eulogy of French prose. In prose the French have commonly a perfection to which the English language can pretend only too rarely. Their prose has order and balance and harmony; it flows limpidly with a charming transparency; it is ever lucid, ever flexible, ever various; it has at once an obvious polish and an apparent ease. And to these precious qualifications for a form of poetry seemingly so unambitious as social verse must be added the possession not only of the wit and the vivacity which are acknowledged characteristics of the French, but also their ownership of something far more needful—the gift of comedy.

“For many years the French have not been more celebrated for memoirs which professedly describe a real society than they have been for the light social song which embodies its sentiments and pours forth its spirit,” said Walter Bagehot, writing in the middle of the nineteenth century. He maintained that the French mind had a genius for the poetry of society, partly because it was “unable to remove itself into the higher region of imagined forms,” and, therefore, it had “the quickest insight into the exact relation of surrounding superficial phenomena.” He held that the spirit of these lighter lyrics is ever half mirthful, and that they cannot produce a profound impression. “A gentle pleasure, half sympathy, half amusement, is that at which they aim,” he suggested, adding that “they do not please us equally in all moods of mind; sometimes they seem nothing and nonsense—like society itself.”

Perhaps it is in consequence of the prosaic element perceptible in much of their more pretentious poetry that the French themselves have not considered curiously their own familiar verse. While there are at least half-a-dozen collections of the *vers de société*

of the English language, a diligent seeking has failed to find a single similar anthology in French. A book of *ballades* there is, but the most of these are serious in tone rather than serio-comic; and the brightest of the many epigrammatic quatrains of the language have been gathered into an engaging little volume. But a selection of the best of their lighter lyrics, having brevity, brilliancy and buoyancy, has not yet been undertaken by any French critic, although he would have only the embarrassment of choosing from out a superabundance of enticing examples.

For the most part, the vigorous verse of Villon, that warm "voice from the slums of Paris," has too poignant a melancholy to be included, for all its bravado gaiety; and, though he tries to carry it off with a laugh, the disreputable poet fails to disguise the depth of his feeling. And yet it would be impossible to exclude the famous "Ballade of Old-Time Ladies," with its unforgettable refrain, "Where are the snows of yester-year?" A larger selection would be easier from Villon's contemporary, Charles of Orleans, long time a prisoner in England—a poet far less energetic and not so disenchanted, but possessing by birth "the manners and tone of good society." Stevenson praised his *rondels* especially for their "inimitable lightness and delicacy of touch," and declared that the royal lyrist's "lines go with a lilt and sing themselves to music of their own."

The *rondel* was the fixed form in which Charles of Orleans was most often successful, although he frequently attempted the *ballade* also. This larger form the later Clément Marot managed with assured mastery. One of the best known of his more playful poems is the *ballade à double refrain*, setting forth the duplicity of "Brother Lubin"—a poem which has been rendered into English both by Bryant and Longfellow, although neither of them held himself bound by the strict letter of the law that prescribes the limitation and the ordering of the rhymes properly to be expected in the *ballade*.

As it happens, the American poets were not happily inspired in rendering this characteristic specimen of Marot's discreet raillery and metrical agility; and in their versions we fail to find the limpid lines and the polished irony of the French poet, who was able so easily to marry the elegant with the natural—qualities rarely conjoined, even in French. And yet Locker-Lampson was able to paraphrase one of Clément Marot's lesser lyrics, "Du Rys de Madame d'Allebert," with indisputable felicity:

How fair those locks which now the light
wind stirs,

What eyes she has, and what a perfect
arm!

And yet methinks that little laugh of hers—
That little laugh is still her crowning
charm.

Where'er she passes, country-side or town,
The streets make festa, and the fields re-
joice.

Should sorrow come, as 'twill, to cast me
down

Or death, as come he must, to hush my
voice,

Her laugh would wake me, just as now it
thrills me

That little giddy laugh wherewith she
kills me.

Space fails here to select samples of familiar verse from the poems of Ronsard and Du Bellay and Desportes, or to excerpt cautiously from the later poetasters who were forever rhyming in the *ruelles* of the *Précieuses*, and who clubbed together to go on record in the celebrated "Guirlande à Julie." But Corneille and Molière and La Fontaine cannot be treated in this cavalier fashion. Taine calls La Fontaine's epistles to Madame de Sablière "little masterpieces of respectful gallantry and delicate tenderness." It is this same note of tender gallantry which strikes us in the poems which Molière and Corneille severally addressed to the handsome and alluring actress, Mademoiselle Du Parc. Corneille's stanzas are almost too elevated in tone to permit them to be termed familiar verse; and yet where they are read in the English rendering of Locker-Lampson they do not transcend the modest boundaries of this minor department of poetry.

In the eighteenth century, we come to Dufresny, with his "Morrows," a little comedy in four quatrains; to Piron, rather more inclined to the pert and pungent epigram than to the more suave and gracious song of society; and to Voltaire, the arch-wit of the age, accomplished in social verse as in every other conceivable form of literary endeavor. Perhaps it was of Voltaire that Lowell was thinking when he asserted that in French poetry only "the high polish kept out the decay." Yet it was Lowell himself who rendered into flowing English an epistle of Voltaire's to Madame Du Châtelet—stanzas in which the aging wit refers to his years, not so touchingly as Corneille had done, it is true, but with dignity, none the less.

In the nineteenth century, it is possible to perceive two diverging tendencies in French *vers de société*, one of them being rather more obviously literary in its manner, and including certain of the more piquant lyrics of Hugo, Musset and Gautier, while the other is somewhat humble in its aim and seemingly simpler in its execution. To this second group belong the best of Béranger's ballads, of Gustave Nadaud's, and of Henry Münger's. Of Nadaud the one perfect example is "Carcassonne," so perfectly Englished by John R. Thompson; and of Münger probably the most characteristic—in its presentation of the actual atmosphere of that bohemia which is truly a desert country by the sea—is the lyric of "Old Loves," sympathetically translated by Mr. Andrew Lang:

OLD LOVES

Louise, have you forgotten yet
The corner of the flowery land,
The ancient garden where we met,
My hand that trembled in your hand?
Our lips found words scarce sweet enough,
As low beneath the willow-trees
We sat; have you forgotten, love?
Do you remember, love Louise?

Marie, have you forgotten yet
The loving barter that we made?
The rings we changed, the suns that set,
The woods fulfilled with sun and shade?
The fountains that were musical
By many an ancient trysting tree—
Marie, have you forgotten all?
Do you remember, love Marie?

Christine, do you remember yet
Your room with scents and roses gay?
My garret—near the sky 'twas set—
The April hours, the nights of May?
The clear, calm nights—the stars above
That whispered they were fairest seen
Through no cloud-veil? Remember, love!
Do you remember, love Christine?

Louise is dead, and, well-a-day!
Marie a sadder path has ta'en;
And pale Christine has passed away
In Southern suns to bloom again.
Alas! for one and all of us—
Marie, Louise, Christine forget;
Our bower of love is ruinous,
And I alone remember yet.

Béranger is like Horace in that he is wholly free from cynicism, and in that he is essentially genial. The French balladist is like the Latin lyrist again in that he has tempted countless English translators—mostly to their own undoing. At first glance, it may appear that poetry so easy to read as Horace's or Béranger's, so direct, so unaffected, ought to be transferable into another tongue without great difficulty. But this appearance is altogether deceptive, and those who carelessly venture upon translation soon discover that all unwillingly they have been paying the highest compliment to the skill with which the metrical artists have succeeded in concealing their consummate craftsmanship. Even Thackeray, with all his cleverness, with all his understanding of Parisian life, did not achieve the impossible feat of making a wholly satisfactory English translation of a song of Béranger's, although he twice attempted the "Roi d'Yvetot," and, although he did not fail to bring over into English not a little of the sentiment and of the sparkle of the "Grenier." Indeed, it is this ballad of Béranger's which satisfies the definition of familiar verse more completely, perhaps, than any other piece of the Epicurean songster's.

A true lyric, whether ballad or sonnet or elegy, is not addressed to the eye alone; it is ever intended to be said or sung. The songs of Béranger are real songs fitted to a tune already running in the head of the lyrist; and they have, in fact, sung themselves into being. The poems of Hugo and Gautier and Musset, even when they are most

lyrical, are rather for recitation or reading aloud; they are not intended for the actual accompaniment of music. Once, indeed, Musset gave us a lyric, which is not only singable, but which seems to insist on an alliance with music. This single song is the "Mimi Pinson," with its exquisite commingling of wit and melancholy. For the most part, the stanzas of Musset are too full of fire and ardor to be classed as familiar verse; they have too resonant a note of passion; and despite their brilliance they are of a truth too sad.

It is only occasionally, also, that a poem of Hugo's falls within the scope of this inquiry. His was too large an utterance for mere social verse; and the melody of his varied rhythms is too vibrating. His legends are epic in their breadth; and he lacks the unliterary simplicity and the vernacular terseness of familiar verse. For all his genius, he is deficient not only in wit and in humor, but even in the sense of humor; and there is some truth in Heine's joke that Victor Hugo's "muse had two left hands." And yet, if a selection from the greatest French poet of the nineteenth century is imperative, it is not impossible to pick out a few of his lyrics which have the needful airiness and grace and charm. To one of these, translated by Miss Ethel Grey, she gave the rather commonplace title, "My Pretty Neighbor."

If you've nothing, dear, to tell me,
Why, each morning passing by,
With your sudden smiles compel me,
To adore you, then repel me,
Pretty little neighbor, why?
Why, if you have naught to tell me,
Do you so my patience try?

If you've nothing, sweet, to teach me,
Tell me why you press my hand?
I'll attend if you'll impeach me
Of my sins, or even preach me
Sermons hard to understand:
But, if you have naught to teach me,
Dear, your meaning I demand!

If you wish me, love, to leave you,
Why for ever walk my way?
Then, when gladly I receive you,
Wherefore do I seem to grieve you?
Must I then, in truth, believe you
Wish me, darling, far away?
Do you wish me, love, to leave you?
Pretty little neighbor, say!

From the treasury of "Enamels and Cameos" there is only the embarrassment of choosing, as no French poet has written poems more translucent and colloquially easy than Théophile Gautier. His is the clear serenity of temper and the unfailing certainty of stroke which reveal the master of social verse. But the French poet's invincible dexterity is the despair of the translator. How render into another language the firmly chiseled stanzas of a lyrist who was enamoured of the vocabulary, and who was ever wooing it ardently and successfully? As Mr. Henry James says, Gautier "loved words for themselves—for their look, their aroma, their color, their fantastic intimations." Locker-Lampson accomplished the almost impossible feat of finding English equivalents for Gautier's French—in the first two quatrains of "A Winter Fantasy"—but even he thought it best to end his own poem in his own way. Mr. Austin Dobson's "Ars Victrix," triumphant as it is in the transfusion of the spirit of Gautier's deepest lyric, is rather a paraphrase than a translation. And perhaps this poem, with all its ease and lightness, is a little too stately and too majestic for true familiar verse:

All passes. Art alone
Enduring stays to us;
The bust outlasts the throne—
The coin, Tiberius.

Of one of Gautier's less fortunate contemporaries, Felix d'Arvers, nothing survives save a single sonnet, perhaps imbued with too puissant a melancholy to be admitted without challenge amid poems brief and brilliant and buoyant; but Longfellow's translation, although not quite so perfect as some of his renderings of Uhland, is so excellent that it pleads for the inclusion of the solitary poem by which alone its author's name is withheld from oblivion.

Another fellow-lyrist of Gautier's, whose fate was sadder even than that of d'Arvers, was Gérard de Nerval, one of whose lyrics has had the good fortune to tempt Mr. Andrew Lang to turn it into English:

AN OLD TUNE

There is an air for which I would disown
 Mozart's, Rossini's, Weber's melodies—
 A sweet, sad air that languishes and sighs,
 And keeps its secret charm for me alone.

Whene'er I hear that music vague and old,
 Two hundred years are mist that rolls
 away;
 The thirteenth Louis reigns, and I behold
 A green land golden in the dying day.

An old, red castle, strong with stony towers,
 The windows gay with many-colored glass;
 Wide plains, and rivers flowing among
 flowers,
 That bathe the castle basement as they
 pass.

In antique weed, with dark eyes and gold
 hair,
 A lady looks forth from her window high;
 It may be that I knew and found her fair
 In some forgotten life, long time gone by.



ERE COMES THE NIGHT

AH, pain that a rose should die,
 That a lily's grace should fail;
 That dark should dim a sunset sky,
 And a rainbow's glory pale—
 And lovers say good-bye!

Alas, that Youth is fleet—
 Swifter than Age is swift—
 That dearest hopes have wingèd feet,
 And Love's a transient gift,
 As shadowy as sweet.

So kiss we while we may,
 While lips are still afire.
 For all too surely creeps a day
 When fades the dear desire
 To ashes cold and gray.

Too surely comes the night
 When the star of Love shall set,
 And the bitter snow of Time lie white,
 And the soul would best forget
 The old, beloved delight.

NANNIE BYRD TURNER.



THE NEW DISEASE

ETHEL—Have you noticed how melancholy George looks when he rides?
 LUCILLE—Yes; he is getting automobilious.



BUT for lace and lingerie woman would have little temptation to be vain—
 and man little temptation.

“THE VOICES”

By G. B. Burgin

MADGE ENDICOTT sighed as she looked thoughtfully out at the fusillading raindrops. For the first time in her life, she did not want to act. Her usual practice was to concentrate herself on her part at least half-an-hour before starting for “The Thespian.” Then, she went to her carriage as in a dream, her maid kept away all intruders from her dressing-room, and she lived and was the heroine of the play until, at the end of it, her own identity returned to her. The clamor of the audience drove away the memory of the part she had played, and she found herself bowing to a sea of dim faces in the theatre, wondering what she had done to evoke their enthusiasm. Sometimes, as she bowed, she thought of that woman who faded away from the stage until the next evening. Did she go to some phantom realm of her own and live her life, or simply dissolve into thin air?

Madge Endicott was a dreamer. When a half-fledged girl, living alone with her grim old studious father, he had brought back with him one night a youth, glorious as Apollo. Somehow, she had conquered his shyness—and her own; their spirits leaped together; they roamed the ancient woods and flowery glades of Eversleigh until one day the lad came to tell her that he must go back to London.

“London!” she queried, aghast. “What is—London?”

“London!” he said. “London! Have you never heard the Voices of London? It is a city where men move and have their being—a city to which they are unwilling slaves; for

the thralldom wherewith it binds them is rarely, if ever, broken even by death itself. There is something in its very atmosphere which sets its seal upon men and women and marks them for its own. By night and day, the great city is never still—its Voices are never silent. Half of its inhabitants sleep while the other half work. From all quarters of the universe, people come to listen to the Voices. Old men and women, youths and maidens, children with clear, innocent eyes; and the great city takes them all to its breast, in Winter folding them beneath its smoky pall, in Summer spreading over them a mantle of blue sky. But once within its meshes, there is no escape from the mark it sets upon its victims.”

“No escape?”

“No; they are magnetized, fascinated. And when they have dwelt there, for a little while, it may be, they are carried away from London’s stony arms—that London which has sucked their life-blood—that London which has drained them of youth and hope and joy—into some quiet place where the great city’s unrest breaks faintly from afar upon dead ears and irks them not. Men, still treading the glad earth, still loving and living, toiling, striving, sorrowing, see the black hearses go by—see the sable horses curbed and reined and flecked with foam—see shambling mutes, those hireling sycophants of woe—and march onward, knowing full well that they, too, one day, will be carried away from the Voices to the green churchyard, with its waving grasses and flower-decked graves, behind these

same somber steeds of Death. Yet, knowing this, they plod on, dusty, footsore, travel-stained, to the great city."

"But," she said, thoughtfully, "God's voice is clearer than the Voice of the Great City. Why not stay and listen to it here?"

He shook his head. "I should die here. London is the Giver of Fame, and I would be famous ere I die. It is the centre of the universe, the realm of thought, the kingdom of all knowledge, all science, everything that makes life worth living. Those who enter it must fight a hard fight or perish. The modern Mirza stands upon a hill and sees those burdened pilgrims who hearken to the Voices, toiling onward with outstretched hands—sees them swallowed up beneath the glaring sun, the quiet Summer stars, the Winter gloom, the dusty, roaring winds of March—sees them play their tiny parts upon life's stage—sees them struggle and falter and disappear—sees them win fame, sit at meat in high places, their names in the mouths of all men. I must fare forth and take my chance of good or ill with the others. The Voices call me; I must go."

The girl caught his enthusiasm. "Ah, yes, I understand now. I understand. If the Voices speak, one must heed. Once you have heard them calling, there is no rest, no peace. Sometimes, I seem to hear them myself in the sighing of the pines, a whisper in the grasses. Yes, Dick, dear, you must go, you must go. But what of those who perish in the strife?"

"Some must perish," he said, sadly, "some must perish. With the morrow's dawn fresh puppets take the place of those of yesterday, only to give place to others in their turn. The poor little parts are played, hearts broken or healed, wrongs redressed—sometimes; hatred and revenge let loose to do their work; yet still the great city endures. 'Hearken,' the Voices cry, 'hearken, O ye peoples of the earth. Come one, come all.

Here is the stage on which ye strut and strive, starve, die, or revel and laugh long. Come, but pay the price, pay the price!' I must go—and pay the price."

"Yes," the girl said, "if one goes, one must pay the price."

She looked wistfully round her at the waving fields of corn, the green hedgerows, the tasseled plumes of the larches. "Yes," she repeated, with a little sigh, "if we go we must pay the price; but all these have breathed into us; they have given us something to—come back to."

When the day of parting came, the lad bent down to kiss her sweet, grave lips, but he had never come back. She, too, had heard the Voices of the great city. She had striven and suffered and fought her way up to the top; but the old name by which the lad had known her was hers no more. She kept that for the time when London's Voices no longer called, and she could go back to the green hedgerows, the waving corn, the plumed larches nodding in the west wind. If she could not see him again, she would never go back. Without him, life was nothing. Only, sometimes, she heard his name. He also was hearkening to the Voices of London's Heart—was great—beloved by the people—a famous playwright; and some day, if the Voices willed, they must meet, their hearts be filled with joy.

To-night, as the raindrops rolled down the window, she asked herself when would God feed this starved, empty heart of hers—that heart which gave forth so much to London with so little return. Would the Voices bring him to her? She was actually playing in one of his dramas at "The Thespian." But he had been away from the Voices for two years. In two years she had become famous, the "leading lady" of "The Thespian." She was cast for the great part in his new drama, which was to be put in rehearsal on the morrow. Would he know her again—the girl who had led him to the cornfields, had shown him the blossoms on the

larches, the mosses in the fairy dells? Once, he had made her stand beside a magnificent marble copy of the Venus de Milo in her father's study. "Some day," he had declared, with conviction, "some day, when you are grown to complete womanhood, you will be like that—the same calm brows, the same deep eyes. You will become a modern Venus, and we shall all worship at your shrine."

And she had driven away the worshippers from the shrine—all save the one who did not come. Her heart hungered for him, she prayed God for him, she saw him every hour; and yet it had all happened five years ago. Five years without a word, a sign, a token that he remembered the shadows of the pines, the upland breezes, the long, level stretches of land over which they had wandered together, the joyous days, the roses of their lost youth.

And suddenly, as she stood there, she opened the window. The Voice of London came to her; the west wind blew two raindrops on her eyes. "My children! my children!" said the Voice, "I spare you—spare you for one another."

"Your carriage, madame," said her maid; and Madge Endicott awoke from her dream.

II

In a gloomy London street, leading down to the Thames Embankment from the Strand, is an equally gloomy-looking house—gloomy, that is, externally. Within, it is decked in harmony with the varying and evanescent moods of that marvelously many-sided being, Dick Sutherland—poet, artist, playwright.

On this particularly somber evening, Sutherland sat in a room at the top of his house, where double windows shut out the sound of the passing traffic. The windows were still further hedged about with Cairene lattice work and loosely flowing curtains. In his leisure moments, Sutherland had amused himself by painting the ceiling with alle-

gorical groups of the months taken from Morris's "Earthly Paradise." Radiant-hued Smyrna rugs were scattered over the oak floor, the bookcases which covered the walls were filled with volumes of all kinds. At the end of the room, stood its only other ornament, the exquisite, life-sized marble Venus de Milo, which Sutherland one day recognized in a Wardour-street shop, and bought as a memorial of the serious, half-fledged girl who, unconsciously, had taught him how to become great.

Sutherland was still scrawling busily. Presently, he wrote "The End," with an air of relief, got up, stretched himself, threw down his pen. "Ten o'clock," he said, as the clock of St. Clements Danes struck. "There's the end of a year's work; and I'd give the whole of it, all I have in the world, just to see that child's face again, just to hear her voice, look into her grave, sweet eyes. She comes between me and all other women, and yet I can't trace her. The father died; they were poor; London swallowed her up. That's all. I taught her to listen to London's Voices, and London has robbed me of her. My God, but it's hard—damned hard! The one thing I want in the world to make me happy—the one thing for which I would sweep a crossing and give up everything—is denied me. Poor little maid! Poor little maid! And I would have worshipped her. I suppose it was not to be!

"Days that are lost lamenting o'er lost days."

Shall I go on mourning her loss forever?"

He stopped before the fireplace, and stretched himself with a yawn. Then, he walked up to the Venus and looked at it wistfully, steadfastly, as the firelight played upon its beautiful limbs. He had fallen into the habit of talking to it as if it were alive.

"Seems rather a waste of time to leave you for the pearl-powdery smiles of the unknown Endicott," he said. "If she were only like you, she could do anything with her part. Urquhart assures me that she can do anything;

that she holds her audience from start to finish. Ah, well! she would be a change from your marble immobility, though she would do well to copy it in some parts of the play. But I don't care to be bothered with the woman. She'll never understand how I want the part played. Like Heine, on the last day of his out-door life, I could fall, smitten and helpless, at your feet, fancy you gazing at me with pity and yearning because I'm such a poor, unhappy devil, and hear the words spoken only for my ear, 'Dost thou not see that I have no arms, and, therefore, cannot help thee?'"

He lighted a cigarette, and called himself an idiot, as an excuse for the restless spirit which had taken possession of him.

"She told me," he resumed, "to listen to the Voices, and to follow where they led. The trouble is, that they haven't led me to her. Life doesn't satisfy me without her." He let his cigarette go out. "You know it doesn't. As a matter of fact, my dear marble woman, you are chiefly to blame for my dissatisfaction. How can I contemplate your ideal perfection and then expect to meet with it in real life! I've met with it only once—in the face of that child who grew up beside you, with features exactly like your own. But I lost sight of her. 'Seek her not,' said the Voices; and, like a fool, I listened to them. Perhaps it's as well. Better to love in vain than to attain your heart's desire and—cease to desire it. Man's nature, at its purest and best, is so imperfect that it degrades, in some measure, the sacredness of woman's—her awful purity. 'Male hogs in armor,' Kingsley calls us. Well, he isn't far wrong; but yet—

"If swine we be—if we indeed be swine,
Daughter of Persé, make us swine indeed;
But, O unmerciful! O pitiless!
Leave us not thus with sick men's hearts to
bleed!—
To waste long years in yearning, dumb
distress."

Sutherland stopped short, lighted another cigarette, and looked at his own face reflected in an ancient mirror

—looked at the bitter lips, the dark eyes glowing with gloomy fire, the straight nose and patrician features. "Faugh! Room's like an oven." He opened the window, then turned to the Venus. "Listen to those lying Voices—Voices which have made us waste our lives in pursuit of shadows when we might have been happy in the green fields. Listen to the infernal, ceaseless din—that din which drowns the voice of God and leads His sheep astray. If I weren't a Christian, I'd cut my throat and end it. Ah-h! What's that? What's that?"

He listened attentively, his face glowing with eager hope. "The Voices! the Voices! Ah! They're gone, gone! Nothing tangible, nothing real. Gone! Always the same old story. For the moment, I almost seemed to hear them say that we should meet again. I have a presentiment that we shall. But there's no truth in presentiments. People never remember them until after something has happened or ought to have happened and didn't. What if, after all, we were to meet again—soon—soon? Soon!"

He shut the window, picked up the last act of the new play and thrust it carelessly into the pocket of his smoking-jacket. "Good night," he said to the goddess. "I'm just going to look in at 'The Thespian' for a chat with Urquhart. He's in raptures over the first act—has been through it with Miss Endicott—says she'll be 'great' in it. Ah! If he'd seen as many new stars as I have, he'd know how brief their flight generally is!"

As he went on, he waved his hand to the goddess. To his overwrought imagination the perfect lips seemed to smile back at him. Then, the firelight flickered down, and her face was lost in the shadows.

Once in the Strand, Sutherland had but a few steps to go, and, knocking at the private door of "The Thespian," he was shown into the manager's room.

The commissionnaire who guarded the private entrance told Sutherland that the performance was not yet over. Presently, he came back with a hurried note

from Urquhart. "Delighted you've looked in, old man. Stay and sup with me. I want to introduce you to Miss Endicott. I'll be round in half an hour."

Sutherland pitched the note into the fire, and, selecting a cozy arm-chair, threw his manuscript down on the table. It uncurled on the last page. In a few minutes, the warmth had its usual effect on any one coming out of the fresh air, and he fell asleep. He was tired, worried; the mental excitement of finishing his play had left him prostrate. His slumbers were so sound that he did not even hear the door open.

Madge Endicott entered the room, and halted by the table. There was a weary look in her eyes; she gazed impatiently round, as if longing to escape. Nothing had come of her presentiment, and she was full of grief. "I'm tired—tired of it all," she murmured. "After playing such a part I can't become modern again in a hurry. What an artist Dick is"—she always thought of Sutherland as if he were still a boy—"in word forms! They are so delicately simple and pure, they bring the tears to my eyes. I have to live in the part, not act it. It isn't acting. My own heart speaks the while."

She wrote a few words to Urquhart on her tablets, and turned to leave the room. Line for line and curve for curve she was a goddess.

Sutherland, half-hidden in the depths of the chair, stirred slightly, and Madge Endicott turned toward him with a little cry of alarm. "At last! at last! The Voices have spoken truly at last!"

Her eyes swam in radiant light; she pressed her hand to her heart to still its hurried beating. Sutherland again stirred, as if conscious of her presence. She advanced a step or two toward him.

Sutherland began to talk in his sleep—an old trick of his which always afflicted him after any mental strain. "Poor child! poor child! Queen of the solitude and silence, dawning into womanhood as a flower opens to the sun. Poor child! poor child!"

She fell on her knees beside him.

"We wandered—wandered—always together—always together. And now she's gone. Poor child! poor child!"

She smiled down upon the tired face, with its sensitive mouth and thin features. "The child went," she murmured. "Yes, Dick, the child went—went with a cruel pain in her heart—went into the world to find it a wilderness. But she grew to womanhood, and studied your plays and worked and worked and worked, hoping, praying, that she might one day meet you again face to face—when you would see in the woman the half-grown girl you praised in the old days. London's Voices led her forth into the hard, cruel world of the stage. As the years went by, she toiled and toiled and toiled, daunted by many failures, but always a little nearer—a little nearer—to success, knowing, by the light of love within her, she must one day surely conquer."

She bent over Sutherland with parted lips, as if to take him to her heart after all the hungry years of waiting and yearning, of probation and trial. As she did so, her eyes fell upon the last page of the drama upon the table:

"But do thou, Phillis, weary not the gods; What has been, even gods can ne'er restore,
And so—the darkness!"

"And so—the darkness," she said. "Dick! Dick! is it your own heart speaking? Are you so unhappy? If I were to marry you, knowing that you would love me only because I recalled your youth before you had lost your ideals, would your love fade away into cold neglect, your poet-wings be clogged to earth. Ah, me! Ah, me! There is a law of change which even Love cannot alter. And yet, the misery of it! Out of his own mouth, he has decided for us both. I will go back to the green fields, the waving corn, and heed the Voices no more."

She neared the door. "But his play, his play! Urquhart says that no one else could act such a part."

Her long, lingering glance drew Sutherland back from the land of dreams. He sprang up and gazed

round in bewilderment. "That you, Urqu——?"

"N-no."

"W-where am I? I—! Oh, I beg your pardon. I was asleep. I—I hope I didn't frighten you? Please forgive me. You must be——"

He trembled violently as she slowly approached him—

"With her two white hands extended as if praying one offended,
And a look of supplication gazing earnest in his face."

The truth dawned upon him, and he strode toward her. "Child! Child! You have come to me at last!"

"Yes, I have come to you at last. The Voices led me."

He gazed incredulously. "Do you come as woman, or marble wakened to life from out the past?"

Her smile was very sweet as she put her hands upon his shoulders. "Yes, I have come from out the past; but do you not see that I have arms to help you?"



IN THE SOUL OF SUMMERTIME

IN the soul of Summertime,
When to rapture, when to rhyme,
Beats each bough and bole and blade,
On the upland, in the glade,
Then I have no thought but one
Under the benignant sun—
Only, sweetheart mine, to fare
Out into the dim somewhere,
Thou for comrade, till afar
Love shall light the vesper-star,
And the plaintive whippoorwill
Home shall call us from the hill.

There'll be iris for thine eyes,
Wherein I see paradise;
Poppies for thy lips will show
Where the golden wheat-waves glow;
And, to match thy hair, there'll be
Depths of woodland shadowry.
And thy smile—but, nay, no more
Delving after metaphor;
For, when in thy radiant mood,
Thou dost shame similitude!
Sight and sound and scent shall be
Perfected for thee and me,
When to rapture, when to rhyme,
Throbs the soul of Summertime!

CLINTON SCOLLARD.



A MAN is never so sure of anything as of something which isn't so.

THE BROTHERS

By Elia W. Peattie

THE high-school exercises were over. Twenty-eight young persons held beribboned diplomas in their hands, and moved self-consciously in their friendly world, where they held a pivotal place.

At dinner that night, Richard Marvin, addressing one of these pivots—his son David—said, with unwonted amiability:

"And what next?"

Mrs. Marvin, who had worn her new foulard to the graduating exercises, and who was looking very handsome, and knew it, also assumed a benevolently parental air.

"Yes, David," she said, "what would you like to be?"

Dick, David's younger brother, prepared to be disdainful, whatever the answer should be. But David had for once forgotten his shyness, which was wont to hang upon him heavily.

"I should like to be a judge," he said.

The remark sounded, in the circumstances, foolish enough. It was, in fact, what the family might have expected of David. Dick was quite ready with his contemptuous giggle; Mrs. Marvin looked annoyed, and Richard Marvin, actually embarrassed.

Nothing except the fact that David, stupid as he was, had actually done well at commencement, and that this day was known to be regarded by him as an occasion of extraordinary importance, kept Mr. Marvin from calling his son—what he truly considered him to be—a fool.

Some shred of dignity was saved to the situation by Mr. Marvin's next remark.

"If you really have a taste for the law, David," he said, "I should like to indulge you in it; but, as you know, I cannot afford to send you away to school. I think the best thing for you to do is to take up with your Uncle Herbert's offer, and go in the bank."

The half-concealed ridicule of his family had been perfectly perceived by the boy. It was evident that if he was stupid, at least he was not obtuse. His china-blue eyes had a film of embarrassment over them. He knocked a spoon off the table with his sleeve, and, stooping to lift it, overturned a glass of water on the clean table-cloth.

"David!" said his mother, sharply.

Dick, a little sympathetic, knowing how luck will get down on a fellow, ventured to remark:

"David's worked like a horse to make his exams, and he made 'em bully well. I think he ought to have a little fun before he's shut up in that hole of Uncle Herbert's. Can't he have a month or two for a good old time?"

Something quite unheard of happened at that moment. David, the fool—who wanted to be a judge—burst into noisy and uncontrollable weeping.

"Well, well, what does this mean?" asked Mr. Marvin, looking at his wife.

"It has been a trying day for David," she ventured, in faint, feminine accents.

David got up and stumbled heavily out of the room. His brother looked a trifle awed. Something must have happened to make a fellow bawl like that.

What had really happened was that

a boy's vague and incohesive dream—a stately and illuminated dream—had been shattered with one blow of the bludgeon of Reality.

David had worked three years at accounts in his uncle's bank. He did his work with reliability, and seemed, indeed, heavy and sullen as he was, to have found his gray *métier*. At least, Dick—who was developing—said to Cornelia Rutherford, with whom he was "going":

"David's running up to his limit. He'll never beat his present record."

"I suppose not," said Cornelia, holding out her slender hand for Dick to snap the glove-buttons—a task which he performed with alacrity; "David's not like you, Dick."

"No," said Dick, with a sense of all that implied; "I mean to get on, Cornie. You know, it was something having those Zeta Psi fellows come down here to look me up as soon as they heard I was going to the university. But I held off. I expect to get a good deal of rushing when I'm at college. I may as well take all that's coming to me."

"I should say so!" acquiesced Cornelia, giving him her lace parasol to carry.

"I mean to make the most of my chances," went on Dick, straightening himself. "Now, when David was ready for college father wasn't able to send him. I don't know as David was exactly cut out for college life, anyway. But I've got the chance, and I mean to distinguish myself, Cornie, for—for *you*."

"Oh!" said Cornelia, thrilling with delight. The two young creatures, being in a safe arcade of September foliage made by the beeches that met across the street, paused for a moment to look into each other's eyes. It was a charming moment. The little gold leaves dropped softly upon their heads. The golden carpet of leaves lay beneath their feet.

"Dick!" said Cornelia, with an accent as unmistakable as the call of a quail to its mate.

"Cornie!" he answered, inspired. He would conquer the world for that little, red-headed girl, in the frock of awkward length, standing there with her selfish, pretty face glorified. But he saw the glory, not the selfishness. Perhaps he would not have objected to the selfishness if he had seen it. There was, indeed, no reason why he should.

The Zeta Psis thought well of their new member. They had always liked a man to be up and doing. Dick Marvin was that, undeniably. His manners were free, gay, confident and charming. His wardrobe was irreproachable. He was as correct in his apparel at breakfast as at dinner. He showed a good-natured willingness to help any fellow out of trouble, and first, last, and always, he was for his fraternity.

"That freshman will do us credit yet," said the upper classmen, nodding their solemn heads.

He was, indeed, a convincing creature. He stood six feet to a fraction, and was well set up. His features were clean-cut, severe and handsome. In spite of his boyish freedom of tongue, there was a certain conservatism in his manner. Under the influence of the fraternity, he acquired a greater propriety of speech.

"Young Marvin's coming on," the Zeta Psis congratulated themselves. They regarded him as being largely of their own creation.

Dick, on his part, bore himself loftily toward the world. He became conscious of his ancestors, who were, indeed, of a good breed and some achievement. His home, his father's well-established business, his mother's social position in her town, his uncle's presidency of the village bank, even his brother's association with the banking business, began to be appreciated by him. In the course of a few months, he had succeeded in exaggerating their importance. He referred to "my people" with proud accents. He felt himself the member of an assured family.

"My brother has the commercial instinct of the family," he would say to the fellows; "he took to banking."

If there were any lack in this life, Cornelia supplied it. She was away at a fashionable boarding-school, and was receiving her own impressions of the world. Dick and she corresponded constantly. They had agreed that they were to live for each other, and they were under the impression that they were doing it.

Dick had a photograph of her pretty face, framed, on the walls. When the Zeta Psis asked about her—and it was etiquette to ask—Dick looked preternaturally grave.

"That young lady," he said, "well—I've known her ever since I was a child. Her people have always been intimate with mine. She's away at Miss Chaffee's school now."

The Zeta Psis were gentlemen. They said no more, but it was taken for granted that Marvin would do no "fussing" at college. Destiny had already done for him. This, also, added to Dick's prestige. He was made an officer of the fraternity.

David, meantime, pursued his way somewhat dejectedly. He grew to feel less and less at home in his own house. He was unpopular with the young people of his own set, and shy and sullen before girls. The only person with whom he felt really at ease was Liston, the cashier at the bank. Liston had whirlwind qualities which swept the fears out of David's soul. He would get David to go on his tandem cycle with him, and the two, far away from the habitations of man, would shout and sing and laugh. Whenever David did succeed in overcoming his timidity he had to do it by revolt.

Liston told him he liked to take the world by the horns. "Save your money and invest it, my boy," he said; "I look forward to bulling the market, some time. I'd like to stir things up on 'Change once."

At intervals, Liston went to the city, to practise roaring and tossing in his

capacity as an amateur bull. He really had his victories, which he confided to David. He asked David to go in with him. Some of his plans seemed a little complex to David, who liked a straightforward way of doing things; but then, on the other hand, what Liston proposed seemed to represent power and independence.

"My father and mother think I'm a fool—they've always thought so," David confided to his friend.

"Show 'em!" said Liston.

"Dick always laughed at me, too," went on David.

"I guess you'll come out ahead of Dick," smiled Liston, in a meaning manner. "If we come out all right on this deal—and I don't see how we can help it—you can rig yourself up, and go down and visit Dick and give him a blow-out. Make him a present of a hundred or two, and see if he doesn't think better of you."

A look of not ungenerous vanity came to the china-blue eyes. The serious face glowed for a moment.

"I'd give the world to have Dick really cotton to me," he said. "Isn't he a corking fellow?"

There was no other word to call it by. It was embezzlement. The court called it that. The newspapers did not mince it. Richard Marvin whispered it hoarsely to his wife; and she, yet more hoarsely, had repeated it in torture.

"What! Not David? Embezzlement? No, no!—oh, God, no!"

The Zeta Psis spoke the word pityingly. "It's a knock-out blow for poor Dick," they said. "By Jove, you know, we've got to stand by him."

Dick, face downward on the bed, saw despair. "I can never hold up my head again," he thought. "All the fellows will know! Cornelia will hear of it! What's the use of trying to get on?"

David's uncle, the president of the bank, admired the Spartan virtues. "I'm responsible to my depositors," he said. "Let the law take its course."

It took it. Sentence was pronounced. David Marvin went to his punishment. His mother shut herself in her house; his father grew grim, silent and old.

"Live it down, old man," said the Zeta Psis, to Dick. "Show the stuff in you!"

Dick, pale, handsomer than ever, moved about with a melancholy dignity. Every one showed him the most marked consideration. A pathetic interest attached to him, and the university felt itself magnanimous when it elected him, in his third year, marshal. He came to be looked upon as an influence, and there was no denying that he had a dominating personality.

When he came home, in his junior year, for the Summer vacation, he fairly forced his father and mother out of their gloom.

"Come," he urged, "are you going to punish me for David's sins? I think that's unfair. I don't enjoy coming home to a tomb!"

There seemed to be something in that, too.

"Mother," said Mr. Marvin, to his wife, "the boy is right. We owe something to him. We are wicked to mourn forever over a thing for which we were in no way to blame."

Mrs. Marvin sighed—perhaps she did not find it so easy to disavow all responsibility—but she yielded. They set up a billiard-room for Dick, and they made a tennis-court, and there were garden fêtes and evening parties.

Cornelia Rutherford was home. Her prettiness had become beauty, and she queened it over the Marvins, who felt complimented by her tyranny.

It chanced, one night, that Dick was giving a musicale. It was really a device to give Cornelia an opportunity to display her fine contralto voice. The old house looked very gay; there were lanterns hanging from the porches, and all the windows were open to let in the breeze.

Dick, who was used to captainship, displayed no little *savoir faire*. He looked actually distinguished in his

evening clothes, and no one could deny that he had a manner.

"We are blessed in that boy, mother," said Marvin to his wife.

The pleasures of the evening were at their height, when Dick, sitting on the sill at the open window, saw some one come slowly up the walk and then withdraw into the shadows. In a few seconds the figure reappeared, this time nearer the house. Dick slipped out on the porch, and vaulted over the balustrade.

"What do you want?" he asked, peremptorily.

"Dick!" said the man, in a choked voice.

"You—David!" There was unmistakable dismay in Dick's accents.

"Yes, Dick. The warden wanted to write, but I thought—I thought I'd rather surprise you."

Dick leaned heavily against a tree, sick and white.

"Of course," mumbled David, feebly, "I never dreamed you would be having company. I thought of—of coming home, you know. I thought you and father and mother would be here alone. I thought I could go up and—and sleep in my old room once more."

The music within doors ceased. Dick rallied himself.

"A fellow I have over from Greenboro is sleeping in your bed," he said, with aversion for the pallid, nervous man before him. "Go around to the side entry, and I'll let you in there. You can get up to the lumber-room. There's a cot there, made up. You can sleep there, and no one will know."

"Know?" said David, strengthening himself. "I don't care how much they know! They know I went to that place, don't they? Well, then, they may as well know I've got out. Why, I've squared myself. That's what the punishment is for. That cleans the slate."

"Hush!" agonized Dick; "for God's sake, hush!"

He went into the house, paused a moment among his guests, and then sauntered on again. At the little,

dark entry, he admitted his brother. David passed him silently, and made his way up the rear stairs to the old lumber-room. He knew the trick of the latch, and let himself into the stuffy, dusty atmosphere of the close and cluttered apartment. The cot stood in its immemorial location. He took off his clothes, and got in between the dusty sheets.

The sounds of revelry came up to him from below. He put his thin hand fast over his eyes, as the burning tears leaped from them.

The next morning, he was awakened by the sound of the rain. It had a near, intimate and friendly sound, and a feeling of comfort and sweetness transfused itself through him in the moment that he lay halting between sleep and waking. Then, he opened his eyes to behold the unplastered, rambling room where he and Dick had played together in their boyhood, hiding behind the chimneys or the presses, or finding treasures in the boxes and bags that littered the place. Sometimes, when the house was crowded with guests, he and Dick had slept there and thought it a privilege. They used to frighten each other deliciously with hobgoblin tales.

But none like this! They never dreamed, in their moments of most terrific imaginings, that one of them would return, a felon, fresh from his imprisonment, and that the other would grudgingly admit him, hiding him away like a thing that must not be seen in the light. No, no! neither of them had ever dreamed that!

David arose, impatiently, opened a little dormer window to let in the sweet, moist, morning air, dressed himself, made his bed, and sat on the edge of it with the enduring patience which he had learned in his latest school.

He could hear the family stirring around, and he wondered how it would be if he were to go out and throw himself in his father's arms.

In time, Dick's white face looked in the door. He had brought some breakfast with him, and he waited while David ate it.

"Father and mother will see you in the library," he said.

David made himself more presentable. Dick and he entered the room together—one, tall, elegant, well-groomed, self-complacent, with the glowing skin of an athlete and light, Summer garments; the other, shrunk-en, pallid, in hideous clothes, piteous and abject.

His father and mother might have been merciful, and were almost so; but, somehow, disgust and shame got the better of them. The family conclave came to little.

"What do you propose to do?" asked his father. "What do you ask of us?"

"Not a thing," flung back David. "What have I ever been led to expect?"

It was an interminable day. For some grotesque reason, it was thought best for David to keep out of sight of the servants till he was properly clothed. So he spent the greater part of the day in the lumber-room, one or other of his family sitting with him. They did not say very much to each other. They sat in heavy silence, like those who watch beside the dead.

But that night, after all the household was in bed, the compassion of motherhood awoke in Mrs. Marvin. She had been molded by her husband till she was little more than an echo of him. Either he or Dick could set her to their time as if she had been a clock. Now, however, she struck an hour for herself.

"My Davie!" she sobbed, in her lonely room, "my poor, poor boy!" She had visions of all he had suffered. A true sense of what he had hoped for in his home-coming swept over her. In her snug, virtuous, moderate life, she had experienced only feeble passions. Now, the black waters of remorse arose about her in appalling tumult. She dressed herself with fumbling fingers. She would go to him in that desolate room, and clasp him about the neck.

"You are my own David," she would say; "after all, you are my own,

own boy! You shall have your place here—sit at your father's table, lie in clean sheets, be clothed as becomes you, live in our hearts. Oh, poor Davie, my boy!"

She saw him as he used to be when he was a little fellow, with soft, short, yellow curls and a skin of pale-gold and pink.

Indeed, it almost seemed as if this tender memory materialized, and guided her with swift, pattering feet out of her luxurious room, along the corridor to the passage that led to the kitchen attic. And, as she went, the sweetest feelings she had known for years flooded her. She was herself—not a woman acting at the dictation or along the lines laid down by another. She would take the poor, poor head in her arms; she would overcome with the abundance of her love the impoverishment of that dear heart!

Ah, little figure, running on before, you cannot go too swiftly!

The door opens—the desolate room, with the rain sweeping in at the dormer, is there!

"David! David!"

The wind has blown her candle out.

"My own boy, it is your mother! I have come to let you know how I love you, dearest—how I have loved you all the time. Oh, David, my first born!"

She has groped with eager hands upon the cot. She has closed the window and relighted the candle. She has searched the room.

She has searched the house. He is not in it anywhere; and the rain is sweeping in angry gusts without.

They found a note.

"I hated to do it," he had written. "I have taken the roll of money that was in father's box. I might have waited and asked, but I knew you would all think you had got off cheap enough. However, I shall send the money back one day. And that will be the only time you will ever hear from me. So please set your minds at rest."

He kept his word. He sent the money back three years from the day

he had taken it. His letter was dated from an Indian pueblo of New Mexico.

"I hope you are all prosperous and happy," he wrote, "and feel no bitterness toward me. I feel none toward you. I have now set my life so far apart from yours that I cannot imagine that our ways will ever cross again. I have married an Indian woman—or, at least, you would call her so. She is a member of one of the desert tribes. I am living among her people. I do not expect you to understand how I could do this thing. I will only say that now you can put me quite out of your minds."

Dick, who was married to Cornelia, told her of the letter.

"An Indian woman!" she said, staring.

"Ah, well!" he sighed, "what could you expect?"

Cornelia looked about nervously to see if the servants were within hearing.

"At least," pursued Dick, "he has some shreds of honesty left."

Cornelia busied herself with her breakfast, and said nothing. She had, indeed, other things to think of. Life was a busy affair with Cornelia. She had brought her husband a handsome fortune, which, united to his own constantly developing interests, had made her the most opulent young matron in the prosperous town. Her determined nature, her intelligent selfishness and abundant physical gifts gave her great advantages. She used them enthusiastically. Her home was handsome, her entertainments unique, her energy unrivaled. Dick was tremendously proud of her. All of the Marvins were. Only, for all of her satisfaction with what life had brought, Dick's mother had hours when she locked her doors on the world. She seemed to have missed something, somehow. For a long time she looked forward to the day when she would have a grandchild to love. But, as the years passed, she drew more and more into herself.

One night—a night of heavy rain—her husband, returning late, missed

her from her room. He searched the house for her, unavailingly, but when he returned to her room, she was there, with tear-stained face. He questioned, half in sympathy, half in anger. He suspected that she had been to that bleak chamber under the eaves. But she said—for a commonplace woman—a curious thing:

"The soul must perform some rites of its own, Richard." And even he was abashed, and asked no more.

Ten years had passed since Dick had placed the wedding-ring on Cornelia's finger.

Now, after months of formality, they were walking again where the September foliage made a bower over the street. Once more the beeches beat them with a golden rain. Once more their feet trod a golden carpet.

"My business, Cornelia," said Dick, "takes me South. I ought to be in Mexico some months. I must also visit New Mexico and Arizona. I may go to Nevada. I cannot tell when I shall be back."

There was a certain arrogant opulence about Cornelia. The locks which had been glowing auburn in her youth were darker now, and arranged in a coronal upon her handsome head. Her mouth was commanding, her tone emphatic. There was a rich plenitude about her fine costume of reddish-brown, and distinction even in the ornaments she wore. She smiled with easy indulgence at her husband.

"Dick," she said, "go where you please and stay as long as you please, and good luck go with you."

"Thank you," Dick retorted, bitterly.

"And as for me, Dick, I might as well sail with the Babcocks. They are to be in Greece and Sicily this Winter, and——"

"It's to be quite a party, I suppose?" The simple words appeared to have a sinister significance, for they brought a flood of angry color to Cornelia's face.

"Oh, it's to be quite a party," she admitted, with bravado.

They walked in silence a moment. The sun was setting in a sky of gold, and the place was transfigured.

"Dick," Cornelia said, at last, "what's the use in staying together and hating each other more and more?"

"At least," he retorted, breathing heavily, "I owe it to myself to see that my wife does not compromise herself."

"Dick!" she cried. They stopped in their walk, and stood as they had years before, screened in with beechen gold.

"Oh, Cornie, Cornie!" he groaned.

He had visited the waste places. He had looked into the heart of the earth. He had met curious men. Now, obeying an impulse he could not control, he journeyed on and on into the silences of the yellow world of sand, seeking his brother.

It was early night when he left the railroad at the proper station.

"There will be no stage till to-morrow afternoon," said the station-agent. "Better go up to the hotel."

But there was a wagon standing by the platform, which an Indian was loading with merchandise that had come on the train.

"Where does that man go?" he asked.

"He goes to the pueblo."

"Will he take me?"

"You can ask him. Some of those fellows will have nothing to do with white men."

But the Indian seemed willing enough. When he had finished loading, Marvin took a seat beside him. The Indian turned his horses toward the south. They drove away into the waste.

The horses went at an even trot over the yellow floor. The stars were above in millions—intimate, mysterious, immutably ancient. All, indeed, appeared to be of old. The driver, silent, patient, strong, was a man who seemed to have dwelt in the immemorial places. He removed his hat and his long, profuse black hair blew about

his face, which was as immobile as that of the sphinx.

Dick asked no questions about anything. The man made no remarks. It seemed best to go on in silence.

After a time, they came to a ruined city—at least, so it appeared. It was, in fact, a group of lava rocks, curiously castellated. A city of brooding men might have lived in the sad chambers of those dwellings not made with hands.

Dick, town-bred, felt a fear of the earth creep over him.

"How far along this monstrous way do we go?" he asked.

"We go four miles more," said the man, in good English.

"What shall I do for the night?" continued Dick. "Can I sleep at your house?"

"My people do not have beds like those of your people," said the man. "But there is an American who has a house where strangers sleep."

"What is the American's name?"

"It is Marvin. He is the governor of our village."

"The governor of your village?"

The man nodded.

They went back to silence again.

At last, they came to the village. Dick could see the adobes rising white in the starlight. They were compacted of the hill—they opened out of it, clung to it, crowned it. They seemed as much a part of the earth as did the hill itself.

A delicious perfume came in whiffs to Dick's nostrils. He was aware that he had reached a place of growing things; and now before him arose a dark island in the pale sea of the arid world, which he knew for trees. He heard the indescribably soft whispering of water in the irrigating canals.

"This is Marvin's place," said the man.

Dick got out, and groped his way along a shadowy path. The trees—ah, the dearth of trees in this desert!—whispered about him. Birds stirred in their nests. The stars pierced the black foliage with their golden fires.

The path ended at a doorway, which

gleamed out white there in the dusk.

The door stood open, and a faint light burned within. Dick entered. The place appeared to be a curious combination of family sitting-room and hotel office. There was a short counter with a register upon it. A woman's work-basket with sewing in it stood on a table which was covered with a gay, flowered shawl. There were chairs about the table—one, a low rocking-chair with a stool. The walls were washed in a delicate gray, and the floor covered with a gray-and-white ingrain carpet. Some mandolins hung on the wall. At the two doors which led from the room were beautiful blankets of Indian workmanship.

Dick stood amazed at the simplicity and comfort of the place. There was an olla on a bench by the door, filled with water, and a gourd hanging above it. Dick quenched his thirst luxuriously, letting the refreshment steal softly over his throat.

The place was as silent as the grave. He could not even hear the breath of sleepers. Cautiously he lifted the curtain of one of the doors. Within was a sleeping chamber with white floor, bare walls, a freshly made bed and a chair. A monk or a prince could have asked for no more and no less.

Dick crept in and divested himself of his clothing. With a strange loathing and delight, with a sense of mingled love and treachery, with dread and anticipation, he knew himself an unbidden guest in his brother's house.

There was a sound of pushing and shoving and laughing—a chorus of soft, stifled laughs—the patter of bare feet on the hard earth. Dick, bewildered, sat up in his bed.

The peculiarly jocund sounds were growing fainter. Dick went to the narrow window, set in its deep adobe wall, and looked out.

Four little brown boys, with close-cut polls and bare feet, were wrestling out under the trees. Dick could catch the gleam of their dark eyes and their white teeth. They rolled together like

frolisome kittens, subduing their laughter cautiously.

"These young barbarians are the sons of my brother," thought Dick, and wondered at the peculiar tingling through all his veins.

The little fellows ran, pushing and shoving, toward the back of the house. Dick got into his clothes hastily, and went out. There seemed to be no one else astir about the house. Dick continued to hear the commotion of the boys, and he followed it. He came to a crevasse in the earth—a huge, yellow crack. When he reached the edge of it, he perceived that it was a river bed. A tawny desert stream flowed through it, and the little boys were demonstrating their amphibian natures. Only their round heads appeared above the water.

Dick stood above them, laughing sympathetically. He felt as if he had been born that hour—born to this peaceful, if ancient, life. About the horizon hung rainbow scarfs. The city on the hill was alive now, and down an immemorial pathway in the rock came the people in their brilliant draperies, bearing their ollas on their heads to fill them at the spring.

The wind had a brave refreshment in it, as if it brought to that home of the sun the kiss of distant mountain snows.

Dick, with a springing step, walked back toward the house. For the first time for many months the heart within him danced.

As he entered the door of the little office, he saw a man. His back was turned, but Dick recognized him instantly. He had broadened, to be sure, and he stood with a sort of commanding confidence which had been alien to David in the old days. Yet there was no mistaking him. He wore a sort of khaki suit, and moccasins on his feet. About his waist was a scarf of carmine—a costume comfortable and appropriate and elegant.

He heard Dick's footstep, and turned.

"He will recognize me," thought Dick, with a fast-beating heart. It is true that a startled look came into the

china-blue eyes—eyes which seemed to have deepened and intensified in their expression—but, after all, the glance held no recognition.

"Good morning," said Dick. "I came here last night with one of your neighbors, and when I found the place all quiet I hadn't the heart to disturb any one. So I crept into that room, and made myself at home." He thought his brother would recognize his voice.

"Quite right," said David, heartily. "You were quite right. Day and night our door is open. Who drove you down?"

"I haven't an idea," laughed Dick.

"Have you registered?" asked David. He pushed the book toward him. Dick felt strangely mischievous. He wrote, in backhand, another name than his own, and gave as his home a city in Mexico at which he had been stationed for the last three months.

David regarded gravely what the other had written.

"We're glad to see you," he said. "I'll let them know you are here. It will not be long till breakfast."

He had the air of being untroubled by little things. Indeed, what amazed Dick most of all was the abiding placidity of his face.

Was this the thief, the felon, the wanderer, the reprobate, the man of hate, sullenness, of covert acts?

But, after all, Dick would have been more surprised had he encountered all this in some other place. There is something about the unchanging peace of the desert that destroys so trivial a thing as surprise.

Dick reflected, with interest, upon the lack of recognition on the part of his brother. He recalled the fact that when David had last seen him he was a lad, with beardless lips, slight and of boyish gesture. Now, with increased stature, broad shoulders, a full beard, a man's confident ways, he certainly had undergone a great change. Added to this was the fact that of all the things that David might be able to imagine—and he had never been distinguished for a vivid imagination—

the appearance of his brother was the last.

There came the sound of a curious drum. Dick's host entered, smilingly.

"Breakfast is served," he said. The phrase seemed, somehow, incongruous with the gong.

In an adjoining room a simple meal was spread—it could hardly have been simpler.

A small, brown woman, with gentle eyes, came in. She was of the desert people, obviously, but was clothed after the fashion of the Americans. A blue gown, a white apron, a wide collar of curiously made lace, completed her costume. Her hair was parted in the middle and combed back from a low, placid brow. She had about her a simple dignity which at once arrested Dick's attention.

"This is my wife," said David.

Dick held out his hand.

"I am honored, madame," he said.

She smiled at him, cordially.

"You had to find your own way in last night," she responded. "We are heavy sleepers."

"You must have easy consciences," laughed Dick—and then could have bitten his tongue out.

"We never think about that," said the woman; "we are all too busy."

"Ah!" cried Dick.

So this was desert wisdom!

The little boys were coming back from their swim. They plunged into the room, and then, perceiving a stranger, paused with a shy, yet delicate alarm, that reminded one of the arrest of a flight of mountain deer. They were beautiful creatures, he noticed, straight of limb and with soft, glowing skins. Their eyes were proud, yet sensitive.

"These are my sons," said David. The boys came forward, one by one, to shake hands, and every one, by some gesture, reminded Dick of his old playmate. The call of blood is loud. He tingled as each brown hand was laid in his.

The family, it appeared, were not to eat with him. They went out into a sort of patio, and Dick heard

them laughing together over their meal.

After breakfast was over, Dick heard David giving directions to some men. They were laborers, evidently, and he was sending them about their tasks. There were maid-servants about the house, too, and they wore their native garments. Every one moved with a peculiar gentleness, and seemed to be in no haste about anything. For an hour, David busied himself over some accounts. Dick, feigning to read, was covertly watching him. Something in the calm exterior baffled him. How could a man, born in a complex civilization be content in this place?

"I to herd with narrow foreheads—" The quotation was cut short in his mind, for David was addressing him.

"At this hour," he said, "I sit in judgment over my people. Would it amuse you to come?"

Dick smiled, curiously. He had a memory of the awkward, ardent boy at his father's table. "I should like to be a judge," the boy had said.

The two men went out into the garden.

"You planted those trees?" asked Dick.

"I planted them," said David.

"To plant a tree, to bear a son, to write a book—these three things the wise man will do," quoted Dick.

"I have not yet written a book," smiled David.

"There is time," said Dick.

"How have you demonstrated the wisdom of your proverb?" asked David. There was a certain benevolence in the glance he turned upon the younger man.

"In no wise. I have not planted a tree, nor borne a son, nor written a book."

"There is time," responded David, throwing back Dick's words.

David went out and sat under a Grevillea tree.

"Will you sit beside me?" he asked. Dick sat at his right hand.

Down from the village came certain of the people. They ranged themselves about their governor. Bonita,

the wife of David, came out and sat beside Dick.

"Do you understand the language of our people?" she asked. Dick shook his head. She began a low, running translation, keeping him acquainted with all that happened.

There came first an old, old man, dried as parchment, swathed in white. His burnous—if one may call it so—enveloped him with countless beautiful folds. He spoke with a fierce intensity.

"The young men no longer heed me," he complained. "The maidens no longer consult me. I brew potions, but they do not drink them; and all one week I made incantations for the son of Antoine, and yet the white-medicine woman was welcomed. And the child died!"

"You did what you could, father," said the judge. "Also, the white-medicine woman did what she could. The child's day had come."

"Our magics crossed," the old man retorted, a senile treble shrilling through his tones.

"Nay," quoth the judge, "for goodness cannot fight with goodness, and both of you were anxious to serve the child."

"But who is he that undermines me with the young men and the maidens, so that they no longer come to me to learn the true ways of things?"

"The new time, father, is that which undermines thee. Behold, the young men and the maidens are sent from the village to the school provided by the great father of our country. They return learned in the new ways, but grateful to thee, father, for thy long guidance."

The old man heard. He wrapped his voluminous draperies closer about him. With long, swift strides, he turned his face toward the desert.

"He has gone to mourn in some place where none can see him," whispered Bonita.

"I pity him," said Dick.

"The schools cannot teach him," replied Bonita; "the grave must teach him."

Then came a woman in the prime of life.

"It is a matter of a thief," she said, in a lofty manner. "Daily I go many times to the spring to fill my jars with water, but always Lojaya, who lives next to me, she being heavy with child, and indolent, steals my water, so that, weary as I am, I must go again to the spring."

David spoke. "And who art thou that thou shouldst not go to the spring for one who is unable? Hear me; once in the morning and once in the evening shalt thou go to the spring for thy neighbor, and she will tamper no more with thy ollas."

And other judgments he gave, not a few. Then returned from the village one whom he had sent thither, bringing with him two young men and a maiden. These David summoned before him, and when they faced him he said to the girl:

"Rita, these young men, Joseph and Juan, disturb the peace of the village with their quarrels. Last night they fought and drew knives, and would have done harm to each other had not men wiser than they parted them."

Rita shrugged a pair of round shoulders, and twirled her heavy silver beads—of octagon shape they were, and very curious.

"Is it my fault?" she inquired.

"Assuredly, it must be thy fault, Rita; for, since they both ache to marry thee, one or the other thou must wed, and set them both at rest."

Rita turned upon the young men by her side a look of inextinguishable coquetry.

"But I love another," she said, "one who is dead."

"If that be so," said David, "Joseph shall be sent to the Navajos, to learn of their smiths, Juan to the Lagunos, to learn of their farmers, and we shall be troubled no more."

"Oh, not Joseph!" cried the girl.

A low ripple of laughter spread among the people. The younger ones clapped their hands. The rejected lover stood erect, with an immobile countenance; but the accepted one turned

sheepishly away, and the girl sped swiftly toward the spring where she had left her water jugs as she came to answer the groom's summons.

David signified that the hour was over, and, laughing and joking among themselves, the people turned away.

"They are pleased with the judgment," said Bonita, nodding and looking proudly at her husband.

Dick drew a large gold coin from his pocket, and gave it to her.

"Will you not run with this to Rita?" he asked. "It is for her wedding dower. She will take it from your hands with more pleasure than from mine."

Bonita took it and hastened away after the girl. There was no one left by the Grevillea tree. Dick arose and stood before his brother.

Far off, the voices of the people sounded. The early wind had died and the sun of the desert was swinging along his mighty course. Dick, alien to the place, felt a strange sinking of the

heart. This patient man, yet stern, this patriarch who guided a childish people, this pioneer who was not afraid of the waste, this man who had redeemed himself, this brother who had been outraged—how would he deal with him?

"Judge me!" said Dick, a passion of self-loathing swaying him. "For I am that brother who always laughed you down when you spoke; I am that brother who took your chance away and would not give you yours; I am that brother who, in the hour of your downfall, sorrowed for myself and not for you; who, in your shame, offered you no comfort; I am that brother—oh, David, judge me as you will—who forced you to creep like a thief into your father's house; David, I am that brother whose vanity and selfishness drove you out of the world of civilized men into this desert!"

Bonita, returning slowly, with a song on her lips, found her husband and the stranger strained together, weeping, in a fraternal embrace.



A ROSE SPRAY

THE keenest pain a lover knows
Is that which kindles in Her scorn,
For then he finds above Love's rose—
The thorn.

But, oh, what ecstasy is born
When She a tender smile bestows!
For then he finds above the thorn—
Love's rose!

FELIX CARMEN.



WHAT SHE THOUGHT ABOUT IT

SHE—Why, I thought the widow was going to let two years elapse before marrying again?

HE—That was her original intention, but she told me confidentially that she thought she ought to have eight months off for good behavior.

EXPERT INSTRUCTION

SOME LETTERS FROM THE PRESENT-HOUR CORRESPONDENCE COLLEGE
OF JOURNALISM TO A PUPIL

By Hayden Carruth

DEAR MR. COMINGFAKER:
Your first lesson-paper has been received and carefully examined. We find much to criticize, of course, but also much of promise. In your imaginary interview you quote your man thus: "I wish to say"—wrong. "I wish to state"—correct. "He stated." "He prepared a statement." "They were stating." The word "say" is used only in conversation, magazines and books. In your suicide, you neglect to close with, "No cause was assigned for the rash act." This shows carelessness. We like the way you refer to the departed as "the unfortunate man," however. We enclose lesson No. 2. Look out for the practical work.

Yours truly,
A. OLDHAND.

DEAR MR. COMINGFAKER:

Your second lesson-paper shows improvement. But a paragraph containing nothing out of the ordinary, you should always begin, "Oddly enough—" In the third line, there is an excellent chance to use the word "fad," which you missed. In regard to your imaginary murder: "Blunt instrument," good; "foul play is suspected," very good; "police are reticent," excellent, though you should have added, "But they are believed to be in possession of important clues." You should also state that "bad blood" existed between the victim and somebody. Your diagram of

the man's henhouse is only so-so. You neglected to put in the tracks of the chickens.

Your practical interview with the servant-girl of your neighbor lacks spiciness. When she refused to answer some of your questions you should have tried what a couple of dollars would do. If she still refused, you should have put the answers you wanted in your report, anyhow. Enclosed find third lesson.

Yours truly,
A. OLDHAND.

DEAR MR. COMINGFAKER:

Your anecdote is readable. The scene is laid in the South, however, and we do not anywhere find the phrase, "befo' de wah." This is very bad. You should not have given up on your shooting affair—it is easy. Shots always "ring out," and "startle the inmates of the building." The other man "returns the shots," or "seeks safety in flight." The chief point to be remembered, however, is the calibre of the revolver; always get this, even if you miss the names of the men. Your imaginary interview is rather good, but in the man's statement you make him use language which is much too natural. Make your descriptions colloquial, if you care to, but remember, in quoting a person, to be bookish and stately. Study the dictionary for uncommon words. Read Dr. Samuel Johnson. N. B.—Important exception: When

quoting an elderly, dignified and educated man—say, a college president—make him use the latest slang. It adds very much.

Glad to know from your report on practical work that the lump on your head where the door-knob struck it is getting better. In doing keyhole work, the journalist has to be very wary. The door is liable to be opened at any moment. Send herewith third lesson.

Yours truly,
A. OLDHAND.

DEAR MR. COMINGFAKER:

We are sorry to see that you under-value details. A paragraph about a stormy Winter day is a small matter, but it betrays the amateur not to speak of it as a "veritable blizzard." Your despatch from the agricultural regions after the rain is very bad. You do not say, "The farmers are jubilant." In regard to the other storm, you should have stated that it "reached the proportions of a cloudburst." We have marked you 100 on your runaway. "Frightened animal dashed wildly"—very good. "Serious accident was narrowly averted"—capital. Try to become accustomed to using the words "quiet" and "quietly;" as, "a quiet wedding," "he was dressed quietly," etc. In your imaginary interview, where the man commences his statement by expressing ignorance of the subject in hand, you make him begin, "I don't know"—bad. "I cannot say"—no better. "I have no information on the subject"—still worse. "That I cannot state"—correct. Should be used invariably.

You complain because, in your practical interview with the stranger you met on the street, he kicked you into the gutter when you asked him if there was anything to conceal about his wife's past. You will not make an up-to-date journalist if you stick at little things like this. Suppose your legs did slip down the sewer opening, you should have shouted another good stiff question at him. We send the

next lesson. You will notice that it is chiefly political.

Yours truly,
A. OLDHAND.

DEAR MR. COMINGFAKER:

Take this lesson again. You have evidently worked hard, but there is much that you fail to grasp. You are right in interviewing "a prominent citizen" and a "leader high in the councils of the party," but you strangely neglect the "well-known Western senator who does not wish to be quoted." The senator and the leader should be "stopping at a prominent up-town hotel." You seem hopelessly entangled as to what constitutes a "statesman" and a "politician." A statesman belongs to your party—a politician to the opposite party. The supporters of a statesman are "earnest workers for the cause of good government," but the followers of the politician are "henchmen." Henchmen obey the "behest of their party boss." Local henchmen are "heelers," and henchmen in the aggregate at convention time are "cohorts." You are right in saying that the speaker of your party "scores" the opposition, but you fail utterly when interviewing the seceder from the opposition. In causing him to refer to his former friends, you should make him "very bitter."

In your practical work-paper, you make a much better showing. Glad to see that you promptly put your foot in the front door when they tried to slam it shut in your face. Sorry your foot was so badly crushed, but pleased to note that you do not complain. If your foot has to be amputated, notify us, and we will forward cork foot. State size of shoe worn.

Please try this lesson again next week, using properly the expressions, "much chagrined," and, "hints of bribery are rife." When you have mastered this lesson, we shall send you our special society-function paper.

Yours truly,
A. OLDHAND.

LA FIANCÉE DU DESTIN

Par Jules Bois

LE train de Limours, sous le soleil du printemps, eut un sifflement de joie en s'arrêtant à la petite gare de Sceaux-Ceinture, enfouie sous les charmes, les sapins et les acacias du Parc Montsouris. Antoine Amoris, sur le quai de la gare, étroit comme un trottoir, guette les très rares portières qui s'entr'ouvrent; enfin une jeune fille bondit sur le gravier. Une émotion longtemps contenue fait trépidant le cœur du jeune homme. C'est bien elle; il la reconnaît, hardie et pourtant incertaine, effarouchée de ce rendez-vous qu'elle a voulu, mince et délicate, dans sa robe de linon, sous son chapeau léger d'où tombe une guirlande de glycines; son cou transparaît à travers le boa de plumes qui la défend contre le matin encore frileux. Tout de suite, il communique avec les yeux étranges, dévorateurs du visage, aux larges pupilles dilatées.

Elle va vers lui franchement, et sa main tremble un peu sur le cristal de l'ombrelle. Ils se sourient:

— Merci, dit-elle; vous êtes bon.

Elle donna son ticket à la barrière, et silencieux, craignant l'indiscrétion des regards, ils glissèrent côte à côte vers l'allée du petit lac.

— Vous n'avez pas mal jugé ma démarche, dit-elle, d'une voix un peu blanche, quoique assurée, puisque vous l'avez acceptée. Vous avez compris que j'avais un absolu besoin de vous voir... J'attends de vous le conseil qui décidera de ma vie...

Une buée transparente planait en core sur l'eau tranquille comme un peu de mystère sur toute destinée;

près de la rive, un saule, avec ses branches tremblantes, se penchait sur ce joli miroir, comme une amoureuse qui voudrait y deviner l'avenir.

Le parc était accueillant, presque vide de promeneurs; à peine çà et là quelques voitures d'enfants; un poète, aux pantalons élimés, leva la tête au-dessus de son livre pour les regarder passer comme la réalisation vivante d'une idylle.

Antoine se taisait: rapidement, dans son cerveau, il résumait les incidents qui les avaient conduits l'un vers l'autre jusqu'à cette rencontre si innocente et qui pouvait passer pour un rendez-vous d'amour.

Ce n'était cependant pas une intrigue banale comme celles qui se nouent bien souvent entre homme de lettres et aventurière. Antoine ne s'y fût d'ailleurs pas prêté. Ses trente ans déjà glorieux, et las des frivolités, où s'attarde parfois toute la vie de certains romanciers, s'étaient retirés à côté de ce parc lointain, dans cette rue Gazan composée de quelques maisons à peine, toutes récentes et n'ayant d'autre vis-à-vis qu'un rideau d'arbres parfumés. Il n'avait pu s'empêcher de remarquer régulièrement à ses conférences, occupant toujours le même fauteuil, une jeune fille pâle et ardente qui semblait boire son geste, ses paroles, avec ses yeux trop grands, inquiets au moins autant de savoir que d'aimer. Une fois, elle lui avait dit quelques mots hésitants après la séance, toute émue au milieu d'un cercle d'amis qui le félicitaient. Il avait appris ainsi son nom, Mlle Jacqueline Lemyre; elle avait perdu, il y a deux ans, son père, un banquier

assez original pour laisser après lui une réputation aussi intacte que sa colossale fortune.

Lorsque, dans son cabinet de travail, Antoine préparait le plan d'une causerie ou écrivait, avec ce style à la fois doux et passionné qui lui était propre, une page de roman, où il disséquait les mœurs du temps, il se prenait tout à coup à laisser là sa ligne inachevée... Au-dessus du manuscrit planait, plus visible qu'un portrait, le visage de Jacqueline, délicate hantise, souvenir obsédant. Il était arrivé à cet âge où la jeune fille devient le plus impérieux attrait. Et c'était non seulement le désir de la compagnie sûre et charmante, de l'associée aux inquiétudes et aux joies, mais encore la haine des solitudes mauvaises, l'horreur des douteuses unions, la fringale de la race, le rêve des enfants qu'il ne faut pas mettre au monde trop tard, de peur de ne point les préserver assez et de n'en point jouir. Jacqueline lui plaisait entre toutes, parce que le hasard banal d'une soirée ou d'une visite d'après-midi ne l'avait pas mise sur sa route. Elle était venue vers son âme, à cause de ses pensées, pour ce qu'il y avait de meilleur en lui, son talent et son éloquence. Une Providence, amoureuse de son bonheur, la conduisait à cette même stalle, d'où elle l'applaudissait—beaucoup mieux par la clarté subite de son regard ou la grâce conquise de son sourire que par ses douces mains gantées. Ah! non pas la fiancée des circonstances ou des vaines conventions mondaines, mais la promise des affinités secrètes, la fiancée du destin!

Mais Amoris n'était ni un neurasthénique ni un veule; ce n'était pas un chimérique non plus; s'étant fait lui-même, à force de luttés et de travail, il savait discipliner ses impulsions, arracher de son cœur les fantaisies inutiles ou morbides.

"Je n'ai pas le droit, se disait-il, de songer à Mlle Lemyre; sa fortune nous sépare à jamais. Elle est d'ailleurs très jeune, et la sympathie réelle... certes, qu'elle me témoigne par son assiduité, n'est sans

doute qu'une de ces flammes délicieuses et passagères qui s'éteignent dans le cœur des adolescentes aussi vite qu'elles se sont allumées."

Aussi avait-il été bouleversé par une lettre franche et insistante qu'il avait reçue la veille et lui demandant un rendez-vous immédiat. Tout d'abord, il pensa à ne pas répondre ou à refuser. Mais n'était-ce pas obéir à un préjugé indigne d'eux? N'était-ce pas douter de lui et d'elle? Et il avait proposé cette promenade matinale et sans périls, car si réellement il pouvait être utile à Jacqueline, il l'aimait déjà trop pour ne pas risquer un peu à le tenter. Et maintenant elle parlait à côté de lui, avec la voix exquise du rêve.

— Si vous saviez comme j'ai été impressionnée par certaines de vos phrases et par plusieurs chapitres de vos livres, au point de voir la vie avec des yeux nouveaux et de sentir se transfigurer mon cœur!

Il ne répondait pas, plus ému qu'elle encore sous son apparence ferme, attendant qu'elle dise la véritable raison de sa démarche, espérant et désespéré à la fois.

— Ma mère veut me marier, dit-elle, et j'en suis effrayée comme de quelque grand malheur... Je vous crois, je vous sais mon ami; que dois-je faire?... Je n'aime pas celui à qui on me donne... En vous écoutant, j'ai appris qu'il ne fallait obéir qu'à sa conscience... Je n'ose trahir mon cœur... je n'ose pas non plus désobéir à ma mère, qui tient beaucoup à ce mariage et que je vais faire souffrir.

Maintenant le soleil avait vaincu la dernière fumée de la brume. Les cygnes fendaient l'eau du lac comme de petites nefs blanches; les bouvreuils et les chardonnerets gazouillaient dans les marronniers; tout cette nature quasi urbaine souriait en rayons et en chants; mais un voile de détresse empêchait les yeux du jeune homme de goûter cette joie de renaître à la vie; et il n'entendait que les palpitations dures de son cœur.

— Il faut vous marier! dit-il.

Il avait prononcé ces paroles comme s'il avait dicté sa propre condamnation, avec l'héroïsme de ceux qui marchent à leur supplice. Quelle dérision que ce côte à côte délicieux hâtant la rupture définitive! Et c'était lui qui avait dit cela. Pourquoi? Parce que, cela, il était honnête et loyal qu'il le dît.

Elle le regarda étonnée, ses grands yeux chavirés de douleur:

— C'est vous qui me parlez ainsi? Vous en qui j'ai foi, vous voulez que j'immole mon destin!

Antoine eut envie de laisser crier son tourment, de lui avouer que c'était à elle qu'il avait pensé comme à la future épouse, qu'elle venait de lui poignarder le cœur, et, qu'en lui disant d'obéir à sa mère il avait, lui, à son tour, creusé encore la blessure horrible. Mais il se dompta: elle était trop riche; il ne pouvait entrer par effraction dans cette famille, comme un voleur de dot.

— J'avais fait pourtant un autre rêve, murmura-t-elle; accepter non pas ce qu'on appelle vulgairement un beau parti, c'est-à-dire une grosse situation avec de l'argent, mais *choisir*... oui, choisir un cœur selon le mien, une intelligence que je pusse admirer et suivre, adopter une destinée que je pourrais charmer et agrandir... et j'allais vers vous, je le confesse, espérant que vous confirmeriez ma secrète préférence, que vous me répondriez: "Agissez selon votre conscience."

Maintenant, Amoris s'était repris; il parla avec une apparente sérénité le langage de la raison et du familial devoir; il dit quelle méfiance il faut avoir pour les passions qui s'éveillent, la nécessité de regarder la vie comme une épreuve et une tâche à accomplir; avec logique, avec sûreté, il déchira le frêle tissu d'espoir dont il avait enveloppé son avenir, il anéantit le bonheur longtemps caressé en lui-même. Il croyait être sincère et juste en se meurtrissant.

Cependant l'heure avait passé à cette besogne délicate et horrible. Ils avaient fait le tour du lac paisible; lui, avec une âme qui se suicide, elle, ré-

voltée contre le sort, indignée de le sacrifier en se sacrifiant. Sous le saule, elle voulut s'arrêter, oppressée à s'évanouir. Et la certitude qu'elle l'aimait se fit en lui; ses nerfs de jeune fille tremblaient sous la pâleur de la peau, autant que les ramures de l'arbre. Elle prit son bras, défaillante; elle se donnait dans ce geste simple, mieux que si elle avait été son épouse, comme s'ils étaient tous deux à la veille de mourir...

Sur le quai de la gare, où il la raccompagna, quand le train venu de Sceaux siffla de triomphe sous le dôme des charmes, des sapins et des acacias, elle le regarda de ses yeux étranges, aux pupilles dilatées, avec une ferveur irrésistible. Elle jeta le mot suprême:

— Vous ne voulez donc pas de moi?

Il pâlit affreusement, ses yeux se fermèrent. Le train, les arbres, la gare, les quelques voyageurs, tout disparut pour lui, s'engouffra dans une sensation de désastre. Il répondit faiblement:

— Partez, votre mère doit vous attendre, ne l'affligez pas.

Le lendemain, Antoine se réveilla, le cerveau et le cœur plus fatigués que s'il avait passé une nuit blanche à sa table de travail. Qu'il avait mal dormi, sa fenêtre entr'ouverte aux souffles exquis montant du parc printanier, éclosion des sèves, longues plaintes des rossignols qui faisaient de cette Suisse brève aux confins de Paris un bouquet d'harmonie et d'odeurs! Vainement, il avait tenté de combattre l'idée fixe par la lecture des chefs-d'œuvre préférés, par l'application acharnée à traduire sur les feuilles éparses le trouble de son âme, que la plus grande tempête de sa vie dévastait. Avec effroi, il sentit impuissant son style, et les plus belles paroles humaines restaient sans saveur devant le souvenir de telle inflexion de voix de l'adorée... Qu'allait-il devenir, si rien n'allait pouvoir le distraire de sa douleur?

La matinée s'écoula dans la dépression et la somnolence après la fièvre de la nuit. Il déjeuna à peine, puis, dans une brusque décision, ordonna de pré-

parer ses valises. Il irait il ne savait où, droit devant lui, emporté par une locomotive miséricordieuse, loin de ce Paris où il ne lui importait plus d'être admiré, loin de ce coin désert et mélancolique où ses plus chers rêves venaient de mourir...

En une demi-heure, il fut prêt; le sac à la main, il allait sortir quand la sonnette tinta. Il ouvrit lui-même. Sur le seuil, une femme âgée qu'il crut reconnaître, mais dont le nom lui échappa, demanda :

— M. Antoine Amoris?

Il s'inclina et fit entrer la visiteuse.

— Je suis Madame Lemyre, fit-elle en souriant.

Il eut un sursaut d'étonnement, comme à un coup de théâtre inattendu.

— Rassurez-vous, cher Monsieur, je vous tends une main reconnaissante et amie. Ma fille m'a raconté sa démarche auprès de vous. Vous avouerez-je que je l'avais autorisée?... Je vous avais admiré jusqu'ici comme penseur et comme artiste, mais vous êtes, ce qui est mieux encore, un honnête homme, et je mets la loyauté au-dessus du talent. Vous aimez ma fille qui vous aime aussi depuis longtemps et vous êtes prêt à y renoncer par une délicatesse aujourd'hui trop rare. Eh bien! je viens ici, Monsieur, vous dire moi-même que je consens à vous la donner. Vous en êtes digne. Le bonheur finit toujours par récompenser celui qui agit selon sa conscience, droitement.



THE ILL WIND

THERE is a wind that blows across Life's plain,
To some blows good, to some blows ill;
To you it comes like music's sweetest strain,
To me so bleak and chill.

Why does the wind through all these weary years,
While sweeping o'er the brine,
Bring freighted argosies to line your piers,
And shattered wrecks for mine?

Why did the tempest turn from out its path
To pass your mansion by,
And on the humble cottage glut its wrath,
Where my stark children lie?

Why should it still pursue me as I go—
Something with which my spirit vainly copes—
To blast the golden harvests that I grow,
And litter all the highway with my hopes?

When Fate shall drop the distaff and the skein,
And life no more allures,
Perchance the wind will sing as sweet a strain
Above my grave as yours.

SAM DAVIS.



FIRST we teach the baby to talk, and then to hold its tongue.

THE STORY OF STELLA

By James Branch Cabell

THEY named her Stella, I fancy, because her eyes were so like stars. It is a mere detail that there do not happen to be any blue stars. I am inclined to think that Nature subsequently observed this omission, and created Stella's eyes to make up for it; at any rate, if you can imagine Aldebaran or Arcturus polished up a bit, and set in a speedwell-cup, you will have a very fair idea of one of them. You cannot, however, picture to yourself the effect of the pair of them, as the human mind is limited.

Really, though, their effect was somewhat curious. You noticed them casually, let us say; then, without warning, you ceased to notice anything. You simply grew foolish and gasped like a newly-hooked trout, and went suddenly mad and babbled as meaninglessly as a silly little rustic brook trotting under a bridge. I have seen the thing happen any number of times. And, strangely enough, you liked it. Numbers of men would venture into the same room with those disconcerting eyes the very next evening, even appearing to seek them out, to court their perils, as it were—men who must have known perfectly well, either by report or experience, the unavoidable result of such conduct. For eventually it always ended in Stella's being deeply surprised and grieved—in somebody's Winter-garden, for choice—never having dreamed of such a thing, of course, and regarding you only as a dear, dear friend. Oh, she did it well, did Stella, and bore these frequent griefs

and surprises with, I must protest, a most exemplary patience.

But we appear to digress. Let us go back to the very beginning of the story—that is, to the place where I come into it. And, in advance, I warn you it is neither very humorous nor very pathetic; I fear it is not even especially interesting; for it treats of no stolen will, no rightful heir, no persecuted innocence nor of any such delectable matters. It is, indeed, a very paltry drama, written and staged by Destiny, that somewhat uninventive playwright. And my part therein is an unutterable minor one. I am only the chorus who comes in at intervals to make—I trust—sufficiently moral reflections on what the others are doing.

When I first knew Stella she was fifteen—an unattractive age. There were a startling number of corners to her then, and she had but vague notions as to the management of her hands and feet. In consequence, they were perpetually turning up in unexpected places and surprising her by their size and number. Yes, she was very hopelessly fifteen; she laughed unnecessarily, in a nervous fashion that was exactly three keys higher than her natural voice, and patted down her skirts six times to the minute. It seems queer now to think that Cleopatra and Stella and Helen of Troy—all the famous fair ones of history—were like that at one time—hopelessly, unattractively fifteen.

As for myself, I was at this period very old—much older than it is ever permitted any one to be afterward. I had the most optimistic ideas as to my mustache, and was wont to encourage it in secret places with the manicure-scissors. I still entertained the belief that girls were rather unnecessary nuisances, but I was beginning to perceive the expediency of concealing this opinion—even in private converse with my dearest chum, where, in our joyous interchange of various heresies, we touched upon this point very lightly, and, as I now suspect, somewhat consciously.

All this was at a certain Summer resort, of which the name is neither here nor there. Stella and I and others of our age attended the hotel hops in the evening with religious punctuality, for our well-meaning elders insisted that it amused us, and it was easier to go than to argue the point with them. At least, that was the viewpoint of the boys.

Stella has since sworn the girls liked it. I suspect in this statement a certain parsimony as to the truth. They giggled too much and were never entirely free from that haunting anxiety concerning their skirts. I honestly believe we were all miserable in unison.

We danced together, Stella and I. We conversed, meanwhile, with careful disregard of the amenities of life. Each of us, you see, feared lest the other might suspect in some common courtesy an attempt at—there is really no other word—spooning. And spooning was absurd.

Heigho! one lives and learns.

I asked Stella to sit out a dance. I did this because I had heard a man with waxed mustachios and an absolutely piratical amount of whiskers make the same request of a young lady pink-gowned and pinched-in in the proper places and—er—expansive in the proper places. It was evident to my crescent intellect that such whiskers could do no wrong.

Stella, I believe, was not uninfluenced by the example of the pinched-

in and shouldered person. As I have said, her corners were multitudinous; and it is probable that those two queer little knobs I remember at the base of her throat would be apt to render their owner uncomfortable and envious of—let us say—more ample charms. At any rate, Stella giggled and consented, and I accordingly conducted her to the third piazza of the hotel.

There we found a world that was new to us.

It was a world of sweet odors and strange lights, flooded with a kindly silence that was, somehow, composed of many lisplings and trepidations and thin echoes. The night was warm, the sky all transparency. If the comparison were not manifestly absurd, I would liken its pale color to that of blue plush rubbed against the nap. And in its radiance the stars bathed, large and bright and intimate, yet blurred somewhat, like shop-lights seen through a frosted pane; and the moon floated on it, crisp and clear as a new-minted coin. It was a Midsummer moon, grave and glorious, that compelled the eye; and its shield was faintly marked, as though some Titan had breathed on its chill surface. Its light suffused the heavens and lay upon the earth beneath us in broad splashes; and the foliage about us was dappled with its splendor, save in the open east, where the low, undulant hills wore it as a mantle.

For the trees, mostly maples of slight stature, clustered thickly about the hotel, and their branches mingled in a restless pattern of black and silver and dim green, that mimicked the laughter of the sea under an April wind. Looking down from the piazza, above the tree-tops, it was strangely like the sea, and it gave one, somehow, much the same sense of remote, unbounded spaces and of a beauty that was a little cruel. At times, whip-poorwills called to one another, eerie and shrill; but the distant music was a mere vibration in the night air, heavy with the scent of bruised grow-

ing things and filled with the cool, healing magic of the moonlight.

Taking it all in all, we had blundered upon a very beautiful place. And there we sat for a while and talked in an aimless fashion.

Then, moved by some queer impulse, I stared over the railing for a little at this great, wonderful, ambiguous world, and said, solemnly:

"It is good."

"Yes," said Stella, in a curious, quiet little voice; "it—it's very large, isn't it?" She looked out for a moment over the tree-tops. "It dwarfs one, rather," she said, at length. "The stars are so big, and so—so uninterested." Stella paused for an interval and then spoke with an uncertain laugh. "I—I think I'm rather afraid."

"Afraid?" I echoed.

"Yes," she said, vaguely; "of—of everything."

I understood, I think. Even then I knew something of the frequent insufficiency of words.

"It's a big world," I said.

"It's all before us," she went on. I think she had forgotten my existence. "It's bringing us so many things—and we don't know what any of them are. But we've got to take them—got to take them, whether we want to or not. It seems a little unfair, somehow. We've got to—got to grow up and—marry and—die, whether we want to or not. We've no choice. And it may not matter, after all. Everything will go on as before, and the stars won't care, and what we've done and suffered may count for nothing—nothing!"

As you justly observe, a highly improbable speech for a girl of fifteen. I grant you that for an ordinary girl. In this case, we are speaking of Stella.

Candor compels me to admit that both Stella and I were unusual children—much the sort of children, perhaps, that you were at fifteen. If you are quite honest, you will acknowledge that at that age you were a prodigy of some sort. We all were. And it is precisely this belief that now leads you to question the probability of what I

am writing, and to deny to fifteen the power of thinking for itself. And why, pray? You weren't an absolute fool at fifteen, you know; you were aware of quite a number of things, if you will remember; and there were dry-throated times when the idea of death appalled you. But, of course, you were a very unusual child. Other children are different.

The point which I wish to make is that they are not.

"Are you afraid to die?" Stella asked, suddenly.

"Rather," I admitted. I really don't know why I told the truth.

"And yet we've got to—got to! Oh, I don't see how people can go on living contentedly when that's always drawing nearer—when they know they must die some day. Yet they dance and picnic and amuse themselves as if they were going to live forever. I—oh, I don't understand!"

Upon my word, I believe we were both a little insane on this occasion. Otherwise, we would scarcely have grappled with precisely this topic.

"They get accustomed to the idea, I suppose"—after a futile pause. "We're rather like rats in a trap," I suggested, poetically. "We can bite the wires and go mad, if we like, or we can eat the cheese and make the best of it; either way, there's no getting out till they come in the morning to kill us."

"Yes," sighed Stella; "I suppose we must make the best of it."

"It's the only thing to do," said I, dolefully.

"Yet—yet it's all so big and indifferent!" she cried, after a little. "And we don't know—we can't know!—what it has in store for us!"

"We'll make the best of that, too," I protested, stubbornly.

Stella sighed again. "Yes," she assented; "still, I'm afraid."

"I think I am—rather," I conceded, after reflection.

There was a very long pause, now. Pitiful, ridiculous infants that we were, we were pondering, somewhat vaguely, but very solemnly, over certain mys-

teries of life and death we have since learned to accept with stolidity. We were very young, you see; to us the miracle of life was still a little impressive, and we had not yet learned to regard the universe as a more or less comfortable place thoughtfully constructed for us to reside in.

Therefore, we sat close together, Stella and I, and were deeply miserable over the *Weltschmerz*. After a little, a distant whippoorwill woke me from a chaos of reverie, and I turned to Stella. I had a vague sense that we were the only people left in the world, and I was very, very fond of her.

Stella's head was leaned backward. Her lips were parted a little, and the moonlight glinted in her eyes. . . .

"Don't!" said Stella, faintly.

I did.

Upon my soul, it simply happened! It was a matter out of my volition, out of my planning. And, oh, the wonder and sweetness and sacredness of it! and, oh, the pity that there is no second happening like that in all one's life!

Stella was not angry, as I had half expected. "That was dear of you," she said, impulsively, "but—but don't try to do it again." There was the wisdom of all the centuries in this mandate of Stella's as she rose to her feet. The spell was broken, utterly. "I think," said Stella, in the voice of a girl of fifteen, "I think we'd better go and dance now."

In the crude morning, I approached Stella, with a fatuous smile. She apparently both perceived and resented this—which was queer, as she never once looked at me. There was something of great interest in the distance; she was flushed and indignant, and her eyes wouldn't, couldn't, didn't turn for an instant in my direction.

I fidgeted.

"If," said she, impersonally, "if you believe it was because of you, you are very much mistaken. It would have been the same with anybody—anybody! You don't understand, and I don't, either. I hate you! Go away!" And she stamped her foot in a fine rage.

For the moment, I entertained a most un-Christian desire that Stella had been born a boy. In that case, I felt I really should have enjoyed sitting upon the back of her head, and grinding her nose into the dust and otherwise persuading her to cry "'Nough!" This pleasure being denied me, I sought comfort in discourteous speech.

"Umph—huh!" said I, "you think yourself so smart! Umph—huh!"

Thereupon, I wisely went away.

"Dear me!" said Stella, wonderingly, when I at last came back; "I should never have known you in the world! You've grown so fa—I mean, you're so well built. I've grown? Nonsense!—and, besides, what do you expect me to do in six years?—and, moreover, it's very rude of you to speak of me in that manner—quite as if I were a debt or a taste for strong drink! It's really only French heels and a pompadour, and, of course, you can't have this dance. It's promised, and I hop, you know, frightfully. Of course, I haven't forgotten—how could I?—when you were the most disagreeable boy I ever knew."

I ventured a suggestion that caused Stella to turn an attractive pink, and laugh. "No," said she, demurely; "I shall never—never—sit out another dance with you." Subsequently: "Our steps suit perfectly—heavens! you're the fifth man who's said that to-night, and I'm sure it would be very silly and very tiresome to dance through life with anybody. Men are so absurd! Oh, yes, I tell them all—every one of them—that our steps suit—even when they have just ripped off a yard or so of flounce in an attempt to walk up the front of my dress. It makes them happy, poor things! and injures nobody. You liked it, you know; you grinned like a pleased cat. I—I like cats, don't you?"

Later: "That's nonsense, you know," said Stella, critically. "Do you always get red in the face when you make love? You've no idea how queer it makes you look."

Still later: "I—I don't think I'm go-

ing anywhere to-morrow afternoon," said Stella.

Shortly afterward, I asked Stella to marry me. Pretty much every fellow I knew had done this, you understand, and it is always a mistake to appear unnecessarily reserved or exclusive. She declined—with a fluency, by the way, that bespoke considerable practice—and subsequently, as the story-books have it, was wedded to another.

I have never quite understood why Harry asked me to be best man. However, it at least enabled me to see this episode of Stella's life from the inside, and to find it—oh, quite like other weddings!

Something like this:

"Look here!" he protested, at the last moment, as we lurked in the gloomy vestry; "look here, Henderson hasn't blacked the soles of these da—blessed shoes! I'll look like an ass when it comes to the kneeling part—like an ass, I tell you! Good heavens, they'll look like tombstones!"

"If you funk now," I said, severely, "I'll never help you get married again. Oh, sainted Moses in heaven! what have I done with that ring? There's the organ! Good God, Harry, look at her!—simply look at her, man! Oh, you lucky devil! you lucky devil!"

I spoke enviously, you understand, simply to encourage him.

Followed a glaring of lights; a swishing of fans and the hum of dense, expectant humanity; a blare of music; then Stella, an incredible, immaculate vision, with glad, shamed eyes.

"—so long as ye both may live?" ended the bishop.

"I will," he quavered—with obvious uncertainty.

Stella's eyes were filled with unutterable happiness and fear, but her voice was level. I found time to wonder at its steadiness, even though just about this time I resonantly burst a button off one of my gloves. I fancy they must have been rather tight.

"—and thereto," said Stella, calmly, "I give thee my troth."

And subsequently they were Mendels-

sohned out of church, to the satisfaction of a large and critical audience. I came down the aisle with an agreeable pink-haired cousin of Stella's who had a mission in life—I forget what sort—and freckles. She proved very entertaining later in the evening.

Yes, it was quite like other weddings—oh, quite like! I wonder I remember it so well.

Stella is making tea for me.

"You're quite by way of being a gentleman," had been her greeting. Then, of a sudden, she rested both hands upon my breast. When she did that you tingled all over, in an absurdly agreeable fashion. "It was uncommonly decent of you to remember," said this impulsive young woman. "It was dear of you! And the flowers were lovely."

"They ought to have been immortelles, of course," I apologized, "but the florist was out of them." I sat down, and sighed, pensively. "Dear, dear!" said I, "to think it was five years ago I buried my dearest hopes and aspirations and—er—all that sort of thing."

"Nonsense!" said Stella, and selected a blue cup with dragons on it. "At any rate," she continued, "it's very disagreeable of you to come here and—prate like a death's-head on my wedding anniversary."

"Dear me!" said I, with a fine surprise, "so it's an anniversary with you, too?" She was absorbed in the sugar-bowl. "What a coincidence!" I suggested, pleasantly.

I paused. The fire crackled. I sighed.

"You're such poor company nowadays," Stella reflected. "You—you really ought to do something to enliven yourself." After a little, she brightened as to the eyes, and concentrated them upon the tea-making, and ventured a suggestion. "Why not fall in love?" said Stella. The minx!

"I am," I confided, venturing on sigh number two.

"I don't mean—anything silly," said she, untruthfully. "Why," she con-

tinued, with some lack of relevance, "why not fall in love with somebody else?" Thereupon, I regret to say, her glance strayed toward the mirror. Oh, she was vain—I grant you that. But I must protest she had a perfect right to be.

"Yes," said I, "that's the reason."

"Nonsense!" said Stella, and tossed her head. She now assumed her most matronly air, and did mysterious things with a perforated silver ball. I was given to understand I had offended by a severe compression of her lips, which, however, was not as effective as it might have been. They twitched mutinously.

Stella was all in pink, with gold things sparkling in unexpected places. I presume the gown was tucked and ruched and appliquéd, and had been subjected to other processes past the comprehension of trousered humanity; it was certainly becoming. I think there was an eighteenth-century flavor about it—it smacked, somehow, of a patched, mendacious, dainty womanhood, and its artfulness was of a gallant sort that scorned to deceive. It defied you, it allured you, it conquered you at a glance. It might have been the last cry from the court of an innocent Louis Quinze. It was inimitable. Ah, if I were only a milliner, I would describe that gown for you in fitting fashion! As it is, set Beer and Paquin to dredge the dictionary, and they will still fail, as I have done. For, after all, its greatest charm was that Stella wore it.

Yet, it made of her—let us say, a marquise—a marquise out of Watteau or Fragonard. Upon my word, Stella in this gown seemed out of place save upon a high-backed stone bench—set in an *allée* of lime-trees, of course, and under a violet sky—with a sleek *abbé* or two for company and with be-ribboned gentlemen tinkling on their mandolins about her. I had really no choice but to regard her as an agreeable anachronism as she chatted with me and mixed hot water and sugar and lemon into ostensible tea. She seemed quite out of place—and yet, somehow, I entertained no special desire to have her

different, or, indeed, otherwise than in this warm, colorful room, that consisted mostly of dim vistas where brass things blinked in the firelight. We had voted it cozier without lamps or candles; this odorous half-light was far more companionable. Odorous, I say, for there were a great number of pink roses about. I fancy some one must have sent them in honor of her fifth wedding anniversary.

"Harry says you talk to everybody that way," quoth she—resentfully and after a pause.

"Oh!" said I. It was really no affair of Harry's.

"Harry's getting fat," I announced, presently.

Stella looked witheringly toward the region where my waist used to be. "He isn't!" said she, indignant.

"Quite like a pig," I continued, with relish. She objected to people being well-built.

Silence. I stirred my tea.

"Dear Harry!" said she. Then—oh, you know what happened, then! I protest that unless a woman is able to exercise a proper control over her countenance, she has no right to discuss her husband with his bachelor friends. It only makes them feel like social outcasts and lumbering brutes and Peeping Toms. If they know the husband well, it positively awes them; for, after all, it is a bit overwhelming, this sudden vision of the simplicity, the credulity, the merciful blindness of women in certain matters. A bachelor has no business to know such things; it merely makes him envious and uncomfortable.

Accordingly, "Stella," said I, with firmness, "if you flaunt your connubial felicity in my face like that I shall go home."

She was utterly deaf to my righteous rebuke. "Harry's in Boston," she went on, looking absently into the fire. "I had planned a little dinner for to-day, but he was compelled to go—business, you know. He's doing so well nowadays," she said, after a little, "that I'm quite proud of him. I intend for him to be a great lawyer—oh,

much the greatest in America. I sha'n't be content till then."

"H'm!" said I. "H'm" seemed fairly non-committal and safe.

"Sometimes," Stella declared, irrelevantly, "I almost wish I had been born a man."

"I wish you had been," quoth I, in gallant wise. "There are so few really attractive men!"

Stella looked up with a smile that was half sad.

"I'm just a little butterfly-woman, aren't I?" she asked.

"You are," I asserted, with conviction, "a butterfly out of a queen's garden—a marvelous pink-and-gold butterfly such as one sees only in dreams and—er—in a London pantomime. You are a decided ornament to the garden," I continued, handsomely, "and the roses bow down in admiration as you pass—er—at least, the masculine ones do," I added, lamely.

"Yes—we butterflies don't love one another over-much, do we? Ah, well, it scarcely matters! We weren't meant to be taken seriously, you know—only to play in the sunlight, and lend an air to the garden and—and amuse the roses, of course. After all," Stella summed it up, "our duties are very simple; first, we're expected to pass through a certain number of cotillions and—and a certain number of various happenings in various Winter-gardens; then to make a suitable match—so as to enable the agreeable detrimentals to make love to us, in a faded, half-hearted fashion, with perfect safety—as you were doing just now, for instance. After that, we develop into bulbous chaperons, and may aspire eventually to a kindly quarter of a column in the papers, and, possibly, the honor of having as many as two dinners put off on account of our death. Yes, it's very simple. But, in heaven's name," cried Stella, with a sudden lift of speech, "how can any woman—for, after all, a woman is presumably a reasoning animal—be content with such a life! Yet that's everything—everything!—this big world offers us shallow-minded butterfly-women!"

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Personally, I disapprove of this morbid, hysterical talk outside of a problem novel; there, I approve of it heartily, on account of the considerable and harmless pleasure that is always to be derived from throwing the book into the fireplace. And, coming from Stella, this farrago astounded me. She was talking grave nonsense now, whereas Nature had, beyond doubt, planned her to discuss only the lighter sort. It was absurd, little Stella talking in this fashion—Stella, who, as we all knew, was only meant to be petted and flattered and flirted with. Stella—why, as she herself had said, it was impossible to take Stella seriously! Such a thing was never intended. Such a thing was unthinkable. I had half a mind to laugh outright.

I fancied, however, she was feeling a bit pulled down on this occasion; or, perhaps, staring at the fire had hypnotized her into an unwholesome, morbid state; or—well, at any rate, she was very grave and very queer, and I didn't like it. I preferred her chattering more breezy nonsense, and standing proverbs on their heads.

Therefore, "Stella," I admonished, "you've been reading something indigestible." I set down my teacup, and clasped my hands. "Don't—don't tell me," I pleaded, "that you want to vote!"

She was absurdly grave. "The trouble is," said she, judicially, "that I am not really a butterfly, for all my tinsel wings. I am an ant."

"Oh," said I, shamelessly, "I hadn't heard! Niece or nephew?"

The pun was bad, I admit. It failed to win a smile or even a reproof from the morbid young person opposite. "My grandfather," said she, in meditation, "began as a clerk in a country-store. Oh, of course, we've discovered since that his ancestors came over with William the Conqueror, and that he was descended from any number of potentates. But he worked—really worked, and was a success; and I fancy I'm prouder of him than I am of any of the emperors and things that make such a fine show in the family tree. For

I am like him. And I want my life to count, too—a hundred years from now I want to be something more than a name on a tombstone. I—oh, I dare say it's only vanity," she ended, with a shrug and her usual quick smile—a smile not always free from insolence, but entirely pleasing, somehow.

"It's late hours," I warned her, with uplifted forefinger, "late hours and too much bridge and too many sweetmeats and too much bothering over silly New Woman ideas. What's the good of a woman's being useful," I demanded, conclusively, "when it's so much easier and so much more agreeable all around for her to be adorable?"

She pouted. "Yes," she assented, "that's my career—to be adorable. It's my one accomplishment," she declared, unblushingly—yet, with some appearance of reason. After a little, though, her gravity returned. "When I was a girl—oh, I dreamed of accomplishing all sorts of beautiful, impossible things! But, you see, there was really nothing I could do. Music, painting, writing—I tried them all, and the results were utterly hopeless. Besides, the women who succeed—the women with any personal achievement to their credit—are always so—so queer-looking. I—I couldn't be expected to give up my complexion for a career, you know, or to wear my hair like a golf-caddy's. At any rate, I couldn't make a success by myself. But there was one thing I could do—I could make a success of Harry. And so," said Stella, calmly, "I did it."

I said nothing. It seemed expedient. "You know, he was a little——"

"Yes," I assented, hastily. Harry had gone the pace notoriously, of course, but there was no need of raking that up. That was done with, long ago.

"Well, he isn't the least bit dissipated now. You know he isn't. That's the first big thing I've done." Stella checked it off with a pink-tipped finger. "Then—oh, I've helped him in lots of ways. He is doing splendidly in consequence, and—and it's my part to see that the proper people are treated prop-

erly." Stella reflected a moment. "There was that last appointment, for instance. I found that the awarding of it lay with that funny old Judge Willoughby, with the wart on his nose, and I asked him for it—not the wart, you understand—and got it. We simply had him to dinner, and I was specially butterfly; I fluttered airily about, was as silly as I knew how to be, looked helpless and wore my best gown. He thought me a pretty little fool, and gave Harry the appointment. That's only an instance, but it shows how I help." Stella regarded me uncertainly. "You—you understand?"

Of a sudden, I understood a number of things—things that had puzzled me. This was the meaning of Stella's queer dinners, for instance; this was the explanation of those impossible men and of the women condensed in red satin and plastered with gems who frequented the house. Stella, incapable by nature of two consecutive ideas, was determined to become a person of influence, to manipulate unseen wires. Upon my soul, it would have been laughable had her earnestness not been pathetic! It was Columbine mimicking Semiramis, Stella posing to herself as an arbitress of fate.

Yet—yet it was true that Harry had made tremendous strides in his profession, of late years. For a moment, I wondered—then I looked at this butterfly young person opposite and frowned. "I don't like it," said I, decisively. "It's a bit cold-blooded. It—it isn't worthy of you, Stella."

"It's my career," she flouted me, with shrugging shoulders. "It's the one career the world—our world—has left me. And—and I'm doing it for Harry."

The absurd look that I objected to—on principle, understand—returned at this point in the conversation. I arose, resolutely. I was really unable to put up with such folly. Yet, somehow, I was suggesting, idiotically:

"You love him?"

"Of course," she said; "why?"

And—ah, well, it was very easy to see that she did.

"Oh, nothing—nothing in the world," said I, brilliantly. "I—I just thought I would ask, that's all."

Whereupon, I went away.

Stella drove on fine afternoons, under the protection of a trim and preternaturally grave tiger. The next afternoon was fine. As they passed me, I remember wondering in a vague fashion if the boy's lot was not rather enviable. There might well be less attractive professions than to whirl through life behind Stella. One would rarely see her face, of course, but there would be compensations—the sense of her presence, the faint odor of her hair at times, blown scraps of her laughter, shreds of her talk, and, almost always, the piping of the sweet voice that was still so rare. Perhaps the conscienceless tiger listened when she was "seeing that the proper people were treated properly"? Yes, one would. Perhaps he ground his teeth? Well, one would, I fear. Perhaps——?

There was a nod of recognition from Stella, and I lifted my hat as they bowed by toward the Park. I went down the Avenue, mildly resentful that she had not offered me a lift.

A vagrant puff of wind was abroad in the Park that afternoon. It paused for a while to amuse itself with a stray bit of paper. At last, it grew tired of its plaything, and tossed it into the eyes of a sorrel horse. Prince lurched and bolted; and Rex, always a vicious brute, followed his mate. I fancy the vagabond wind must have laughed over that which ensued.

After a little, it returned and lifted the bit of paper from the roadway—with a new respect, perhaps—and frolicked with it over the close-shaven turf. It was a merry game they played there in the Spring sunlight. The paper fluttered a little, whirled over and over, and scampered off through the grass; then, with a gust of mirth, the wind was after it, gained upon it, lost ground in eddying about a tree, made up for it in the open, and at last chuckled over its playmate pinned to

the earth and flapping sharp, indignant protests. Then *da capo*. Oh, it was a merry game—a tireless game that lasted till the angry April sunset had flashed its last palpitant lance through the tree-trunks farther down the roadway. There were people there and broken wheels and shafts, and men were lifting a limp, white heap from among them.

They played half-heartedly in the twilight until the night had grown too chilly for their sport. There was no more murder to be done; and so, the vagrant wind puffed out into nothingness, and the bit of paper was left alone, and the stars—the incurious stars—peered forth one by one.

It was Stella's aunt who sent for me that night. A wheezy hand-organ ground out its jiggling tune below as her brief note told me what the casual wind had brought about. It was a despairing, hopeless, insistent air that shrilled and piped across the way. It seemed very fitting.

The doctors feared—ah, well, telegrams had failed to reach Harry in Boston. Harry was not in Boston, had not been in Boston. He could not be found. Did I think——?

No, I thought none of the things that Stella's aunt suggested. Of a sudden, I knew. I stood silent for a little and heard that damned, clutching tune cough and choke and end; I heard the renewed babblement of children; and I heard the organ clatter down the street, and set up a faint jingling in the distance. And I knew with an unreasoning surety. I pitied Stella now ineffably—not for the maiming and crippling of her body, for the spoiling of that tender miracle, that white flower of flesh—but for the falling of her air-castle, the brave air-castle that to her meant everything. I knew what had happened.

Later, I found Harry—no matter where. The French have a saying of infinite wisdom in their *Qui a bu boira*. The old vice had gripped him irresistibly, and he had stolen off to gratify it in secret—more grossly

worded, he had not been sober for a week. He was on the verge of collapse even when I told him—oh, with deliberate cruelty, I grant you—what had happened that afternoon.

Then, swiftly, the collapse came. I could not—could not for very shame—bring this shivering, weeping imbecile to the bedside of Stella, who was perhaps to die that night. That was the news I brought to Stella's aunt, through desolate streets already blanching in the dawn.

Stella was calling for Harry. We manufactured explanations.

Nice customs curtsy to death. I am standing at Stella's bedside, and the white-capped nurse has gone. There are dim lights about the room, and heavy carts lumber by in the dawn without. A petulant sparrow is cheeping somewhere.

"Tell me the truth," says Stella, pleadingly. Her face, showing over billows of bed-clothes, is as pale as they. But beautiful—exceedingly beautiful is Stella's face now that she is come to die.

It heartened me to lie to her. Harry had been retained in the great Western Railroad case. He had been called to Denver, San Francisco—I forget where. He had kept it as a surprise for her. He was hurrying back now. He would arrive in two days. I showed her telegrams from him—clumsy forgeries I had concocted in the last half-hour.

Oh, the story ran lamely, I grant you. But, vanity apart, I told it convincingly. Stella must and should die in content. My thoughts were strangely nimble, there was a devilish fluency in my speech, and lie after lie fitted somehow into an entity that surprised even me as it took plausible form. And I had my reward. Little by little, the doubt died from her eyes as I lied stubbornly in the hushed silence; little by little, her cheeks flushed brighter, ever brighter, as I dilated on this wonderful success that had come to Harry, till at last her face was all aflame with hap-

piness. Ah, she knew! She had dreamed of this, had worked for this for months past. But she had hardly dared hope for this much; she could not be certain even now whether it was the soup or her blue silk that had influenced Musgrave most potently. Both had been planned to wheedle him, to gain this glorious chance for Harry. Dear Harry!

"You—you are sure you're not lying?" said Stella, and smiled as she spoke. She believed me infinitely.

"Stella, before God, it's true!" I lied, with fervor. "On my word of honor, it's as I tell you!" And my heart was sick within me as I thought of the stuttering brute, the painted female, the stench of liquor in the room— Ah, well, the God I called to witness strengthened me to smile back at Stella.

"I believe you," she said, simply. "I—I'm glad. It's a big thing for Harry." Her eyes widened in wonder and pride, and she dreamed for a moment of his brave future. But, of a sudden, her face fell. "Dear, dear!" said Stella, petulantly; "I forgot. I shall be dead by then."

"Stella! Stella!" I cried, hoarsely; "why—why, nonsense, child! The doctor says—he is sure—" I had a horrible desire to laugh. It all seemed so grotesque.

"Ah, I know," she interrupted me. "I—I'm a little afraid to die," she went on, reflectively. "If one only knew—" Stella paused for a moment; then she smiled. "After all," she said, "it isn't as if I hadn't accomplished anything. I—I've made Harry. The ball's at his feet now; he has only to kick it. And—and I helped."

"Yes," said I. Oh, I grant you, my voice was shaken, broken out of all control. "You've helped. Why, you've done it all, Stella! There isn't a young man in America with his prospects. In five years, he'll be one of our greatest lawyers—everybody says so—everybody! And you've done it all, Stella—every bit of it! You've made a man of him, I tell you!

Look at what he was!—look at what he is! And—and you talk of leaving him now! Why, it's preposterous! Harry needs you, I tell you—needs you to cajole the proper people and keep him steady and—and— Why, you artful young woman, how could he possibly get on without you, do you think? How—how could any of us get on without you? You *must* get well, I tell you! In—in a month, you'll be right as a trivet. You die! Why—why, nonsense!" I laughed. I feared I would never have done with laughing over the idea of Stella's dying.

"I've done all I could. He doesn't need me now." Stella thought for a moment. "I think I shall know when he does anything especially big," she went on, after consideration. "God would be sure to tell me, you see, because He understands how much it means to me. And I shall be proud—ah, yes, wherever I am, I shall be proud of Harry. You see, he didn't really care about being a success. But I'm such a vain little cat—so bent on making a noise in the world—that, I think, he did it more to please my vanity than anything else. I nagged him, frightfully, you know," Stella confessed, with frankness, "but he was always patient. And he has never failed me—not once, though I know at times it was very hard for him—" Stella sighed, and then laughed. "Yes," said she, "I think I'm satisfied with my life altogether. Somehow, I am sure I shall know when he's a power in the world—a power for good, as he will be—and then I shall know my life counted for something. For I shall have helped. So I ought to sing *Nunc Dimittis*, oughtn't I? Yes—I think I'm quite satisfied," Stella ended, judicially, and laughed again.

I? Oh, yes, I was making an ass of myself. I have half a mind to do so now as I think of Stella and how gaily she went to meet her death.

"Good-bye," said she, after a little, in a tired voice.

"Good-bye, Stella," said I. And I kissed her for the second time.

A woman in mourning—mourning fluffed and furbelowed and jetted in a pleasing fashion that seemed mutely to beseech consolation of all marriageable males—viewed me with a roving eye this morning as I heaped daffodils on Stella's grave. I fancy she thought me sanctioned by church and law in what I had done—viewed me in my supposed recent bereavement and gauged my potentialities—viewed me, in short, with the glance of resigned and adventurous widowhood.

My faith, if she had known!—if I had spoken my thought to her!

"Madame"—let us imagine me, my hat raised, my voice grave—"the woman who lies here was a stranger to me. I did not know her. I knew that her eyes were very blue, that her hair was sunlight, that her voice had certain pleasing modulations; but I did not know the woman. And she cared nothing for me. I have brought her daffodils, because of all flowers she loved them chiefly, and because there is no one else who remembers this. It is the flower of Spring, and Stella—for that was her name, madame—died in the Spring of the year, in the Spring of her life; and daffodils, madame, are all white and gold, even as that handful of dust beneath us was when we buried it with a great flourish of crêpe and lamentation, just two years since. Yet the dust here was tender flesh at one time, and it clad a brave heart; but we thought of it—I among the rest—as only a costly plaything with which some lucky man might while away his leisure hours. I believe now that it was something more. I believe—ah, well, my *credo* is of little consequence. But whatever this woman may have been, I did not know her."

I should like to do it. I can imagine the stare, the squawk, the rustling furbelows, as madame flees from this grave madman. She would probably have me arrested.

You see, I have come to think differently of Stella. At times, I remember her childish vanity, her childish, morbid views, her childish gusts of petulance and anger and mirth; and I smile—tenderly, yet I smile.

Then comes the memory of Stella and myself in that ancient moonlight and our first talk of death—two infants peering into infinity, somewhat afraid, somewhat puzzled; of Stella making tea in the firelight, and prattling of her heart's secrets, half-seriously, half in fun; of Stella striving to lift a very worthless man to a higher level and succeeding—yes, for the time, succeeding; of Stella dying with a light heart, elate with vain dreams of Harry's future and of "a life that counted"; and, irrationally enough, perhaps, there seems a sequence somewhere—a whiff of tragedy, faint yet pungent. And I picture her, a foiled, wistful little wraith, very lonely in eternity, regretful of the world she loved and of its absurd men, unhappy—for she could never be entirely happy without Harry—and, I fear, indignant; for Stella desired very heartily to be remembered—she was very vain, you know—and we have all forgotten. Yes, I am quite sure that even as a wraith, Stella would be indignant, for she had a fine sense of her own merits.

"But I'm just a little butterfly-woman," she would say, sadly; then, with a quick smile, "aren't I?" And her eyes would be like stars—like big, blue stars—and afterward, her teeth would glint of a sudden, and innumerable dimples would come into being, and I would know she was never meant to be taken seriously.

Heigho! let us avoid all sickly sentiment. . . .

You see, the world has advanced

since Stella died—twice around the sun, from solstice to solstice, from Spring to Winter and back again, traveling through I forget how many millions of miles; and there have been wars and scandals and a host of débutantes and any number of dinners; and, after all, the world is for the living. So we agreed unanimously that it was very sad; and the next week Emily Van Orden ran away with Tom Whately; and a few days later Alicia Wade's husband died, and we debated whether or no Teddy Anstruther would do the proper thing; and, in due course, we forgot Stella, just as Stella would have forgotten us.

And I? Well, I was very fond of Stella. It would be good to have her back—to have her back to jeer at me, to make me feel red and uncomfortable and ridiculous, to say rude things about my waist, to bedevil me in divers ways. Yes, it would be good. But, upon the whole, I am not sorry that Stella is gone.

For there is Harry to be considered. We can all agree that Harry is a good fellow, that he is making the most of Stella's money while it lasts, and that he is nobody's enemy but his own; but, I fancy, we have forgotten the time when we expected him to become a great lawyer. We don't expect that of Harry now; and we say, some of us, that he is nearing the end of his tether. At any rate, Harry is now in England, where his infatuation for Paquita—you may recall her as the dancer who boxed a royal ear not long ago—is tolerably notorious. And as Stella loved him—

Well, as it was, I took the daffodils to Stella. She was always vain, was Stella; it would have grieved her, had no one remembered.



SHE OWED HER ONE

MISS PASSÉE—I should like to see a young man try to kiss me.
Miss YOUNG—You cruel thing!

THE UNPOSSESSED

MY Heart's Desire hath led me
Through barren lands and vain,
And bitter bread she fed me,
And bade me drink of pain.
Ah, me! I climbed a weary way
To heights of her disdain,
Yet would I give the years I live
To walk the path again.

The Heart's Possessed beside me
Leads me a level way;
There may no ill betide me,
No thirst or famine stay.
She hath no wish but wish of mine,
No joy save to obey,
And at my side her form must bide
Until my dying day.

My Heart's Possessed hath stilled me
From all unrest malign;
Yea, eased the hope that thrilled me
With too keen pain and fine.
Yet, O my Heart, my Heart's Desire,
My ungained dream divine,
That never turned the while I yearned
Nor closed her hands in mine!

HELEN SCOTT.



EDUCATIONAL ITEM

“HAVE you heard the latest educational item?” asked Biggs.
“No,” replied Wiggs; “what is it?”

“They have just decided,” said Biggs, “to rewrite the primer in words of five syllables for Boston children.”



REGGIE'S CONCLUSION

“OH, mama!” shouted Little Reggie, as he ran to his mother in great glee,
“what do you think? I was just over there where they're putting up
the circus, and they're filling the ring all full of breakfast food.”

ABSORPTION

BELOVED, in the still deeps of thine eyes
 Absorb my soul, that I may know no more
 The pain of separation! I implore
 Thy Self to take me in, and solemnize
 My union with thee in some mystic wise.
 I would no more be I, but would explore,
 As thee, thy soul's dim temple, and adore
 Therein, as thee, with secret sacrifice.

Oh, let me die to Self, and find rebirth
 In some fair body as one soul with thee!
 There are no purposes in life for me,
 But as thy complement; nor any worth
 In all the fame and splendor of the earth—
 Unless one perfect spirit we may be.

ELSA BARKER.



JUST SO

MRS. HOON—Mrs. Kidder's baby fell out of a second-story window yesterday,
 and wasn't hurt a bit. Doesn't that seem strange?
 MR. HOON—Well, I don't know. Perhaps it is a bouncing boy.



THE COMMON FATE

DAN CUPID limped into his office,
 All battered and bruised was his head;
 A bandage and splints graced his person—
 "I umpired a love-match," he said.



DARWINIAN

FIRST MONKEY—It seems to be a toss-up whether man is descended from
 us.
 SECOND MONKEY—Yes, it's heads, they win; tails, we win.

HANDSOME JACK

By Elias Lisle

WHEN Handsome Jack first struck the old Skopa Ranch, the boys didn't just take to him. In the first place, he was a stranger. In the second place, he was a swell—no missing that. Then he looked about as chummy as a rattleweed. Nobody knew his name; nobody knew where he came from; nobody knew how he got his place, or why, or how long he'd stick—or nothing. One thing was sure, though—he was onto his job, even if we weren't onto him. A girl down at Red Bottle nicknamed him Handsome Jack one day, and the outfit took it up because the name fitted. We had to call him something, and he wasn't the sort of guy you can say "Here you!" to, or whistle when you want him. Some of the ladies at the station thought he was, but they found out pretty quick he didn't know they were alive. That was another queer thing about him—until we learned.

It was Limbo Aleck that first made Jack solid with the boys. He rolled in from the highlands one day, with the red liquor inside showin' pink through his skin.

"Well, well, well!" he says, sizin' Jack up. "Who knocked that off the parlor mantel?"

Nobody said nothing, and Jack didn't make a move.

"Finished real delicate, ain't he?" Aleck pursued. "Where's the plush-lined box you came in, Marmaduke?"

Jack was just as thoughtful as a lizard in the sunshine. Accourse, Aleck had ought to have knowed that any man with the nerve to sit still and take that without a quiver is to

be approached with caution. But Aleck was nothin' but a megaphone for the Old Booze to holler through. He ground out a few more observations; then, over he goes and pats Jack on the head real patronizing-like. Aleck's hand weighs about twenty pounds, and his manners are mighty ornery when he wants to make 'em. Jack was real put out. He got up and swatted Aleck one in the jaw that would have knocked his head lopsided, if he hadn't swatted him the mate to it in the other jaw to set it on straight again. Talk about sinking softly to rest! Aleck stretched out so comfortable he didn't wake up for near an hour. Did he apologize? Not just exactly. Couldn't, because he had to wear his jaw in a sling for a week, and by that time the scrap was outlawed.

Naturally, we all treated Handsome Jack some considerate after that, particularly as we'd already made out that he could ride more than a few, and that his gun-record was in the Handle-with-care class. Only for one thing he'd 'a' been mighty popular: he was so blame' reserved!—never said a word about his own affairs. Yes, sir, he was a sure-enough shy and shrinking violet when it came to anything about himself. Why, he shot as pretty a hole as you ever saw through Dutch Peter's left ear, because Dutch asked him what brand he wore when he was on the home ranch. Dutch said it was a pretty tart answer to what was meant for a civil question, but he never laid it up against Jack. They got to be good friends, after a

while, and right up to the finish, if Jack spoke to Dutch on the side of the frilled ear, Dutch'd turn around the other way, and say:

"Try it on this side, old man. That one's kinder sore on you yet."

It was Dutch that was along with me the day *she* came. We'd rode down to meet the train, and get a line on some overdue express, and, while we were collecting explanations from the conductor, there was a little stir down where the one passenger car stood, and a woman got off. You could tell in a second by her gait and style that she was blooded stock.

"Lord Harry!" says Dutch. "What's *that* doin' in this apology for hell?" he says. Don't go thinking now that Red Bottle ain't as nice a little berg as need be, with four places where you can get first-class liquor, and a faro game with French plate mirrors. But it *did* look kind of mean and shabby, with her for a centre-piece. And she was some flanged, too, lookin' around kind of uncertain and helpless. We had a chance to size her up good—and we did. Says I to Dutch:

"Well, I'll be everlastingly——"

"Same here," he says, interrupting. Then he took another look, and he says, "That's the only job God ever did that's better than Handsome Jack."

Now, Dutch is a gentleman all right, and he means well, but his bazoo ain't always tuned as sweet and low as a Summer zephyr, and the lady must have heard at least part of what he said, for there was a kind of smile in her eyes as she walked right up to us.

"Are you from the Skopa Ranch?" she says, and her voice was the last finishing touch to make a man want to lie right down in the dust before her.

"Ye-yes, ma'am," says Dutch, taking off his hat. I was standing like a locoed colt staring at her, till Dutch, who was strong on genteelness, twists his mouth sideways, and growls at me:

"Shake that head-bag, you Kiyote, or I'll shoot it off."

By the time I got my hat stuffed into my shirt-front, I began to come to, and realize that the lady wanted to find somebody at the ranch.

"How does one get there?" she asked.

"You climb onto a bronc, ma'am," says I, eager to please, "an' hike like——"

"Shut up!" snorts Dutch. "It's a good twenty-five miles, ma'am," he says to her.

"Can't I get a carriage, a cart—anything to take me?"

"No rolling stock short of the ranch," says Dutch, "except the ticket-agent's bicycle. Limbo Aleck shot a hole in the tire of that last week, to see what kind of wind was inside."

"I want to find some one—a friend," she says, after a minute. "I heard you speak of Handsome Jack. Is he—? What is his other name?"

"There's his autograph, ma'am," says Dutch, turning his lone-star ear toward her. "That's as near as any one here ever came to finding out his name."

"Oh, it's a dog, then," she said, disappointed. "And he bit you there?"

"I'd hate to call him that, ma'am, exceptin' by cable," Dutch replies. "And he didn't bite me, he shot me."

"I'm sure it's not Eric," she said, looking rather startled. "He wouldn't be so murderous."

"It ain't murder in this country to shoot a man's ear off, miss," I put in. "And, as for Eric, Jack looks like that might be his real name."

"What does he look like?" she asked, eagerly. "Is he tall and dark with a brown mustache——?"

"Beggin' your pardon, lady," says Dutch, "if you was a little darker you'd be a marker for his sister, wouldn't she, Simon?"

"No, not that," she says, very quiet; but the color came up in her face, so I was sorry for her. I wanted to kick Dutch, but I held in on her account. Maybe she'd 'a' thought it wasn't polite. "Tell me more about him," says she.

"Well, he's medium tall," I says, "with small hands and a hell of a grip—Ow! Oh!"

"Yes, yes," she says, eager. "Please don't interrupt him," she says to Dutch, so severe that I bet he was sorry he jolted me in the stomach.

"Slim built, and a swell, I guess," cuts in Dutch, while I was swallowin' breeze. "Oh, and he's got a big scar over his right temple."

"It's Eric!" she says, with a gasp. "Take me to him. No; I must be sure. You'll go ahead, won't you, and ask him if he's Eric?"

"Excuse me!" says Dutch, rubbing his bum ear. "Curiosity ain't my besettin' sin, ma'am."

"Nor courtesy," she cries, flashing a look at him. But, in a second, she put her hand on his arm. "I'm sorry," she says. "You've been very good, both of you."

"Oh, hell!" Dutch busts out. "What's an ear or two between friends? I'll do it. Take my horse, ma'am, and I'll borrow one."

All the way out, her talk was like the singing of a Spring robin, until we neared the ranch. Then she quieted down. It was Handsome Jack's night trick that day, and I figured Dutch wouldn't have to risk his features, for we'd just about catch him coming up from the river after his swim. So we did. As we rode up the rise he come over the top of it. She gave a little cry that fluttered in her throat, and rode ahead.

"Laddy!" she says; "my Laddy!"

I never knew a full-grown man could fall off a horse asleep or awake, but Jack came near to it then.

"Helen!" he says, with a great ring of joy in his voice; but his face was like a sick man's.

"Laddy," she says again, "I've come—I had to."

He was off his horse, and beside her.

"And where is *he*?" Jack says, looking at her hard. She made a gesture like throwing away something worthless. "You must go back," he says. "This is no place for you. I can't look after you. I'm on duty to-night. My

God, Helen, why did you come to torture me?"

Down she slipped from the saddle, and put her two hands on Jack's shoulder. They were the two most beautiful creatures I ever laid eyes on. For them, there was nobody else in the world just then, I reckon.

"There's a picture," I remarks to Dutch.

"Yes, but not for us to rubber at. We've got a date to size up the sunset from down by the river-bed. Hike along!"

Dutch was a sure-enough gentleman, even if he was a little slow about it. We hiked, but, as we went along, I heard her voice, with the thrill of music in it, say:

"I'll ride out with you to-night, Eric; and, to-morrow——"

It was early the next morning that Dutch and I met her. There was something changed about her. Her voice was softer, and her face was between joy and sadness, so that you couldn't tell which it was. She rode up to us, and asked us could we ride back to the train with her. All the way she was very silent, yet, some way, I felt as if we had sort of become friends; as near as might be between a beautiful, high-toned woman like that and two rough ones like Dutch and me. At the station, she took our hands, one in each of her little ones, and she says:

"When we are happy, some day, he and I, you are to come and see us. I want you to remember me always."

Then, she handed Dutch a little parcel. "If you don't hear from me within a week, give it to him for me. Good-bye."

Within a week she said, so she couldn't have known what was coming. On the way back, we found Jack's body. He must have shot himself as soon as she left. Dutch sat down and cried like a baby. He was for riding back to Red Bottle, and sending telegrams and things to her—which was a wild idea, considering we didn't know her name, let alone her address.

We buried Handsome Jack, without any name on his tombstone—for a good reason. Maybe we could have got one from the packet she gave us. I wanted Dutch to open it, but he wouldn't have it.

"No," he said; "you know how reserved Jack was. If he was here and seen me open it, like as not he'd shoot my other ear off. No, he didn't want no name, and he ain't going to get none. We'll just bury the package with him."

And we did.

Three weeks later, Dutch and I had got hold of a newspaper and split it. I'd got first draw, and was reading the matrimonial advertisements, when I heard Dutch cuss kind of constrained and unnatural. There he stood, staring at the paper he held, with a twisted face.

"Anything wrong at home, Dutch?" I asked.

"No," he said. The paper dropped out of his hands. I picked it up and handed it to him. He was all in.

"Simon," he says, "the Princess!" Did I tell you that we'd called her that when we talked about her? It seemed to fit as well as the other name fitted him.

"What about her? You've found out who she is?"

With his finger on a big, splurgy head-line, he handed me the paper. The piece told of the death of a big railroad official's wife, supposedly from brain fever following a shock, "soon after a mysterious trip to Montana." I looked at Dutch. He nodded his head.

"It's her," he said.

For a minute, it froze me cold. To

think of Handsome Jack lying out there alone by the riverside, and the Princess, she that seemed all made of beauty and music and warm colors and happiness, dying right after it!

"Dutch!" says I—and to save me I couldn't keep my voice steady—"Dutch, I feel like I'd lost money!"

"How did he ever send her away?" says Dutch, like a man arguing with somebody. "How could he have the nerve, and her with that pleadin' look in her eyes? Why, I never could have done it in God's wide, green world! Jack must have been made of chilled steel. He killed her when he killed himself."

"But ain't it a queer game?" I says, "her dying that way without knowing of his death? Maybe she did know. Looks like one of those fancy mind-reading games——"

"Looks like fancy hell!" says Dutch. "She knew it from the letter I took off his body, and mailed to her."

"I didn't see you take any letter."

"You wasn't meant to."

"Then you knew her name right along?"

"Simon," says Dutch, "I don't know her name, and I never did know it, and never will. I've forgotten all about it. See? So have you. And, if you ever get a hunch that you haven't, I'll shoot your damned head so full of holes you can use it for a sieve."

Dutch certainly had a mighty emphatic way about him some folks mightn't like; but I reckon he was right. He's a gentleman, Dutch is; and I'll back him to know what's the square thing. I never did have much of a memory for names, anyway.



HE EXPLAINS

"LAKESIDE has two single daughters and an unmarried one."
 "Why the distinction?"
 "The unmarried one is divorced."

OFF WITH THE OLD

By Edward Boltwood

AT the door of the Brookeses' house, my balance of resolution was thrown out of adjustment by old Mason, who turned the knob. Butlers should be changed every decade; deliver me, for one, from the ancient family servant. Mason grinned respectfully.

"Mr. Robert," he purred, as if I were in college.

"I have not seen you for a long time, Mason," I said, stiffly. "Is Miss Agatha at——?"

Now, I had carefully schemed to use her last name.

"If you will wait in the drawing-room, Mr. Rob." And Mason was gone.

So I crossed the threshold with my plan of campaign ruffled. Even the butler had done his best to set me at once on the old and dangerous plane of intimacy.

In the drawing-room, the Brookes *penates* served the same disturbing purpose. I recognized, for example, a porcelain shepherd and his shepherdess, about whom Agatha and I joked the Winter before she came out. I caught myself hunting for friends and finding them—a twisted candelabrum, a miniature of Aunt Juliana, a carved chair with ingenious spikes to stick into your spine. Really, how absurd it was that, after so prolonged a residence in Europe, the Brookeses should return to New York with this painfully familiar bric-à-brac!

The clock on the mantel began to sound five. It used to catch on the third tinkle, and was invariably a quarter fast—at least, so Agatha claimed whenever she was late for an

appointment with me, which was often. One, two, and now the third stroke jangled. I sighed, and consulted my watch. The clock was fifteen minutes ahead of time.

However, I carry a portrait of Susan inside my watch-case. The habit is commonplace, but comforting. Accordingly, I looked at Susan and was comforted. The thing had to be done, somehow. There was a flurry of the portières.

"Rob!" Agatha gave me her hands, and, naturally, I took them—both of them. She has extremely nice hands. We sat down. I secured the chair with the spikes.

"You see, I lost no time in coming, Agatha. I took you at your word."

"Of course."

"Of course?" Already, I was clutching at the conventional straw of reminiscence. "You once hated people who took you at your word—'duff-muffs,' I think you called them."

Agatha laughed, crinkling her eyes. "I do still; but in this case, it's different."

A man is sensible to be on guard when Agatha crinkles her eyes.

"In this case," she went on, "you knew that I am quite as anxious to see you as you are to see me—and more so, probably."

"Did you like Mentone?" I demanded, sternly.

"Not in the least," said Agatha. "But Mentone liked me, which was more important, on the whole."

"Mentone is human." This would not do; it was necessary, at any cost, to play the brother. "Mentone liked

you because you are clever," I explained, pompously, "and good."

"One must be clever to stay good in Mentone. Then there were St. Petersburg and Buda-Pesth and the Isle of Wight. We yote from Gib to Alexandria."

"Yote?"

"Past tense of verb, 'to yacht.' And I think you might have written me."

"Quite true," I assented. "But if I had, I would have nothing to tell you now."

"Well!" Agatha's scorn was as charming as ever. "You are telling me absolutely nothing, as it is."

"True again." And I thought desperately of Susan.

"Why don't you recite some of those unwritten letters?"

"That's a fine scheme," said I, meditating. It was an excellent scheme, but the trouble was that I had rehearsed an entirely different method of imparting the news. However, "Dear Agatha—" I began, and balked.

"Expressive," she commented, encouragingly, "but brief. I presume you would have cabled it. What was the date of that letter?"

"I haven't finished. The date is a year ago."

"We were in Derbyshire with three dukes. Proceed, sir."

"Dear Agatha: I am sure you are not changed a bit."

"You can be positive," she interpolated, dropping her delightful, brown eyelashes.

My heart also dropped for the fraction of a trifle. Could it be possible that she still imagined that she—?

"Don't interrupt," I advised. "To continue: 'I am sure you are not changed a bit. I am not changed, either.'"

"What on earth could change us?" asked Agatha.

"Well, an auto accident," I suggested, boorishly.

"I'm serious. Rob, we have always been such reliable chums!"

She reached out an impulsive hand.

My backbone became panicky, or was it the carving on the chair? At all events, I shifted to the divan beside her.

"Dear Agatha!" I exclaimed.

"Another letter?" said she, innocently.

"Chums is the very word I want to talk about. Suppose something should happen to make a difference in that?"

She raised her eyes, and frowned straight at me. I did not know where to look, and so I looked at Agatha. Whereupon, she frowned the harder and the more becomingly.

"Pay attention to me," she directed.

"Ah, who wouldn't?" said I.

"Rob, dear—" her tone altered to what I used to call her stained-glass voice—"Rob, you make me think that we must understand things together as we never did before. Oh, why can't we be children always? There never was any difficulty about understanding then. Can't we be wise now, like children—in spite of the nonsense that is bound to come, I suppose, to every man—and woman?"

Involuntarily, my fingers pushed themselves into my pocket and around the watch.

"Your letter is unfinished," hinted Miss Brookes.

"Yes—"Yours faithfully, Robert Cryder," I concluded.

"Rather terse," she pronounced, critically. "Nevertheless, I have a sweet disposition, and I shall answer it."

Agatha dominated a dusky corner of the divan. She was molded into a gown of a sort of bluish gray or grayish blue—well, I haven't much of a notion about her gown, for the reason that her face was sufficient to engage the entire attention of any number of men from one to a million. Of course, I realized before that Agatha was beautiful, but now— Ah, Susan, Susan!

Agatha commenced her fanciful letter soberly, leaning forward so that a sunbeam fell on the bronze hair.

"Dear Robert: No matter how many new people I meet, I remember my most perfect pal."

"Thank you," I acknowledged; "but dare I put it—sententious?"

"Did you say sentimental?" cried Agatha.

"I did not," I replied, loftily. "Sentimental, indeed!"

Agatha held me for a second in her eyes. "Sentiment is part of the nonsense that's bound to happen," she murmured, and turned her head.

It seemed incredible, but there was a tear in her voice. And, hang it all, why did she look shivery and pitiful, as if she needed to be kissed? Heaven knows I couldn't kiss her! Disaster was ever the result of this confessional business. I swung nearer to Agatha on the divan.

"There are worse things than sentiment," said I. Now that the time had come, I croaked like a raven, just as I expected. "I've been sentimental in your absence—irredeemably sentimental."

She made a little gesture of protest.

"I mean it, Agatha. Sentimental in altogether a new way."

"Must you go on?" There were real tears in her eyes now.

"I'm afraid so. Last Summer, I found a spot in my heart I didn't suspect before. It had been covered up by stuff that doesn't count. Am I to blame? And the finding of it changed all of my life for me, except our friendship; it——"

Agatha took a long breath, and squared her shoulders.

"You can't go on, dear," she said, gently.

"Why not? I must tell you. I came to-day on purpose to tell you. It is best for both of us to get it over with."

She glanced at me more softly and more pitifully than is imaginable.

"Rob, I am engaged to be married," said Agatha.

"Oh, may the good Lord deliver us!" I ejaculated, piously. "So am I."

For the instant, we were not less petrified than the shepherd and his sweetheart on the mantel. Then, Agatha pounded her knee three times in an exceedingly vulgar fashion.

"I am glad," she gasped, and laughed until her cheeks were wet.

"That's evident," I observed, as soon as I could observe anything. "When you are through being so violently glad, I'll congratulate you."

"But I was afraid to tell you," she panted, groping for her handkerchief. "Afraid it might hurt you! How did I know what notions you might have about our old affection? Rob, why didn't you speak of your engagement the first minute I came into this room?"

"Who is he?" I temporized.

"Who is she?" retorted Agatha.

But I maintained a discreet silence while she related glowing particulars about Sir Gilbert Stratton, after which Agatha listened sympathetically to my Susanic rhapsody.

I had managed to do pretty well, considering. The credit, however, was perhaps not entirely mine.



SUCCESSFUL

HER aim was never very good,
Yet well it played its part;
She threw herself at Cholly's head
And hit the fellow's heart.



MANY an oyster who finds himself at a swell banquet would rather be at home in his bed.

DUST

SPURNED by the foot, its mystery blows,
 Dust of the galley, dust of a king,
 Of lover who sang love's deathless rose—
The laughter of Time is a silent thing.

Dust of the lute and of lips that are dead;
 Golden lily and flowering quince,
 Pain forgotten and passion fled,
 Hearts that have loved and wept long since.

Seed of the mold and of winding-sheet,
 Grain of gold from a crumbled crown,
 Myrrh and aloe and time-spent sweet—
 Dust, on a breath of the East blown down.

Snared in a web of wind and of sun,
 Mingle and mix they, serf and king,
 Stripe and sceptre at last are one—
The laughter of Time is a silent thing.

VIRGINIA WOODWARD CLOUD.



A REMINDER OF HER FAILURE

THE WIFE—The idea of your coming home in this condition! I am ashamed of you!

THE HUSBAND (*who has been out with the boys*)—You (hic) ought to be (hic) 'shamed of yourself. Didn't you (hic) marry me to reform me?



HOW IT WAS DONE

"I THOUGHT Miss Plumpleigh figured on marrying Jack."
 "So she did, but another girl with more money outfigured her."



MISS HOMELY—I find this balm excellent for preserving the face.
 MISS CYNIC—But why do you wish to preserve your face?